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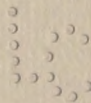






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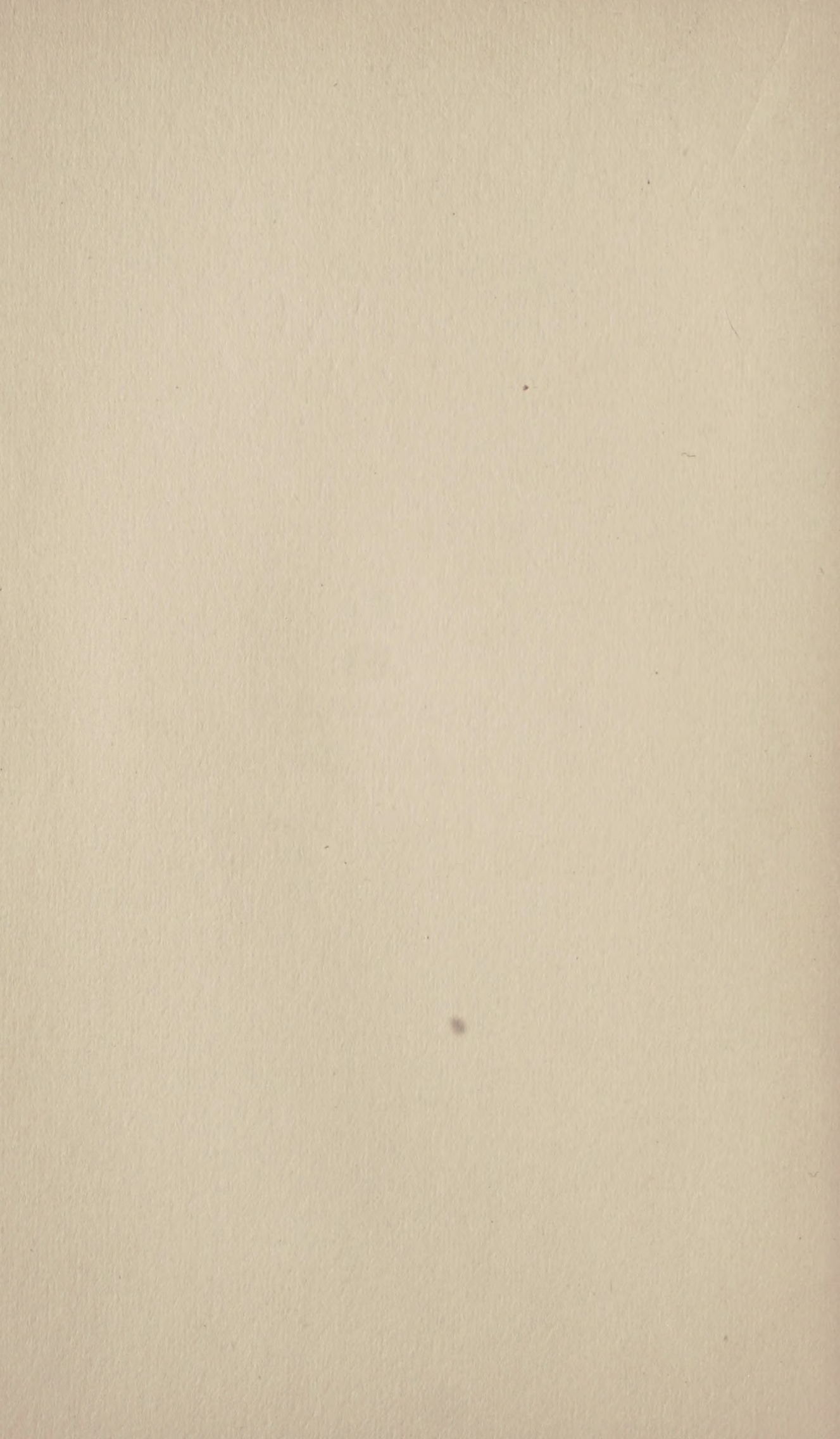


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To  
MY  
FORMER  
FRIENDS







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# THE RELUCTANT LOVER

## CHAPTER I

### THE HOME OF A DECADENT

"To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance."—WILDE.

"**M**R. HUGO and another gentleman to see you, sir."  
"All right, Beaumont; show them in."

Cyril Fitzroy reluctantly closed his book and changed his position in the chair to bring the intruders within his line of vision. He was a tall, thin man of three or four and twenty, with fair hair and dark blue eyes. His face wore a slightly weary expression, natural or assumed, and his voice had been attuned to a note of quiet languor, which was in keeping with his expression. There was a symmetry of design in his whole appearance and surroundings which could hardly have been the outcome of mere chance. The room was furnished throughout in Jacobean oak, the wall-paper—where pictures and book-



cases did not hide it from view—was of a biscuit color, the carpet was a quiet and unobtrusive green. The flowers on mantelpiece and tables were pure white and helped to strengthen the impression which the whole room gave forth, that the owner had striven for an effect of somewhat somber repose and absence of bright coloring. The pictures even were in black frames and consisted entirely of engravings; it was perhaps surprising to find on inspection that they were all creations of the decadent genius of Aubrey Beardsley. There was only one place in all London where these rooms and their owner could find their fitting architecture and atmosphere, and no one who had closely inspected them and had any knowledge of Cyril wondered at his living contentedly in the remote and gloomy Temple.

The door opened and admitted his visitors, and Cyril greeted them without rising from his chair.

“Hullo, Hugo, what brings you away from Chambers at five o’clock in the afternoon? How did you fight your way through the double line of your clients? And why, above all, why did you bring Johnny with you?”

“I didn’t bring him. I disclaim all responsibility for his presence. He wormed his way in at the door as I was asking if you were at home.”

Hugo Fitzroy abstracted a cigarette-case from his brother’s pocket and sank into a chair. There was a certain resemblance between the two that both eagerly and promptly denied when an ill-advised stranger commented on it, but Hugo



was nine years older and presented a generous breadth of body which his brother lacked, and a generous lack of hair which Cyril still retained. This was partly due to the necessity of wearing a wig in court, but principally—as Cyril pointed out—to his brother's rapidly advancing age. The other new-comer was John Stanford, a man two years Cyril's junior and just down from Oxford. He was tall, dark-haired, and stoutly built, with a plump face and great gravity of manner, which it was the delight of his friends to disturb.

"I did not come here to be insulted, Cyril," he remarked, "either solo or in chorus."

"It would be difficult for a mere outsider to guess why you *have* come here. The hypothesis that I invited you is untenable."

"As untenable as the hypothesis that I really wanted to see you."

"And I have already explained that I did not bring you," added Hugo.

"This is where special knowledge of your character comes to my aid," said Cyril. "It is five o'clock and Johnny has had no tea."

"Female servants make the worst tea in the world," remarked Hugo, "but you may take it from me that barristers' clerks are good runners-up. That explains my presence here too."

Cyril sighed. "I'm sorry. I wanted some tea too, but your arrival has upset things."

"How so?"

"I dislike drinking my second quality tea."



"So do I."

"Your dislike of drinking my second quality, or Visitors' tea, is as nothing to my dislike of your drinking my first quality, or Self tea. But I suppose I must sacrifice myself and descend to your level. You are sure you prefer having tea here to going out and buying it at a neighboring shop?"

"Quite sure, thanks; aren't you, Johnny?"

"Yes, and we want first quality. Ordinary hospitality compels you to give us that."

"My dear boy, I pay four shillings a pound for it, and *you* wouldn't know the difference. You are not old enough to appreciate good China tea."

"Well, what about Hugo?"

"Oh, he's old enough. Old enough for almost anything, but appreciation of good tea requires undivided attention, and he has been frittering away eight or ten years of his life at the Bar."

Cyril leaned over and rang the bell for tea-things to be brought in.

"Well, Johnny," he asked, "how have you been occupying your unprofitable leisure since last I saw you? You were making yourself conspicuous by paying marked attention to Lady Irene Halliday when last the discreditable waters of your life mingled with mine. Are you prospering in that direction? From her mother's remarks to me, and still more from my remarks to her mother, I should say not. Lady Fieldmarsh regards you as a detrimental."



"So I gathered from Lady Irene, but as I pointed out to her, her mother's disapproval of me is neither here nor there. I disapprove, with equal or greater strength, of her mother, but I don't shout it from the house-tops. A certain reticence should be observed in these matters."

Hugo threw away his cigarette.

"When you are as old as I am, all mothers will regard you as a detrimental, but the knowledge of this will not disturb you—for the mothers will have served their turn. You will show them quite plainly that their daughters, if they ever attracted you, have long ceased to please; that their suppers, if you ever digested them, have long ceased to agree with you; and that it amuses you no longer to stay up till five in the morning working yourself into a state of heat that is as exhausting as it is unnecessary."

"Then what happens?" asked John Stanford.

"Oh, then you take to simple pleasures. You leave the disapproving mothers, who silently reproach you for eating their salt and omitting to marry their daughters, and mix only with people of an age where no misunderstanding can arise. Nowadays I seldom love anyone above school-room age, and I am welcomed by the mothers as a well-meaning middle-aged man who comes to amuse the children."

"And no doubt the children find you amusing; but can you say the same of the children?"

"Emphatically."

"Without a doubt," added Cyril. "When I



dance with girls of fifteen or sixteen I feel a process of moral elevation going on which leaves me almost unrecognizable. They talk to me nicely, commenting on the floor and the music, asking me if I go to many dances and what plays I've seen. It's as different as possible from ordinary ballroom small-talk. That nearly always comes back to a discussion and description of one's stomach, why you refuse some things at supper and eat others, how you feel in the morning and what you can face for breakfast when you are not as strong as usual."

"What curious partners you must have!" remarked John Stanford. "How do you select them?"

"First by looks, then by their estimated capacity for dancing. I walk up to the best looking girl and say: 'You don't remember me.' She can only say 'Yes, I do,' or 'No, I don't,' and from this conversation begins rapidly to flow. If she proves on trial to be a skilled waltzer, we waltz. If not, we sit and talk. Usually, as I said, we discuss our stomachs, but my effort is to get the young person to tell me about her soul. One meets an occasional very entertaining soul in the course of a season. Another cup of tea, Hugo?"

"No, thanks; I must get back to Chambers."

"Work heavy?"

"Partly that, partly I cannot face the prospect of hearing you and Johnny discussing the souls you have dissected in the course of your brief, wasted lives."



"But the subject is dismissed. I cannot discuss it alone, and Johnny sees he is disturbing me and has been fidgeting to get away."

"No, I must get back. Are you dining at the Cynics' to-night?"

"Probably. I never know until the hour comes. Good-bye. Do take Johnny with you!"

As no response was made to this invitation, Cyril turned to his remaining visitor.

"There, Johnny, goes a man who is entirely lacking in the faculty of amusing himself. It is partly indolence and partly an ingrained reluctance to cultivate any interests outside his work. If you want anyone to act as your model in life, Johnny, you had better take me rather than Hugo. I find the world a very amusing place, but Hugo ends up a long day's work and thinks of nothing but dinner, a cigar, and bed. Then up again to work next morning, and so on from one year to another. It distresses me to see how unhappy people can make themselves by trying to uphold the dignity of labor."

"I wonder if your methods are any more successful. You never seem to do anything but sit and smoke from one meal's end to another. You have never studied life as an art."

"But what is life but an Oxford Sunday, an imperceptible gliding from meal to meal? I observe life from an eminence and find my fellow-man very diverting. I like to study him in every aspect. He is an odd little creature, born into this world without being consulted on the subject,



and creeping out of it at the end of his predestined period, usually against his will and without knowing where he is going. Like you, it amuses me to see how he occupies his time. One man thinks he is going out like a candle: I like to see him trying to enjoy his little life before that day comes, marrying a wife and trying to perpetuate his little self in his children, or giving himself up to riotous fleshly indulgence and being sorry for it afterwards. Another amuses himself by thinking he is going into another world when he dies. I like to see him making his preparations for that, fashioning a little god in his own little image, putting little laws and prophecies and gospels into his little god's mouth, and then expending his leisure in explaining why he does not live up to them. Then another professes to be undecided what fate the future has in store for him, but wants to be on the safe side by devoting himself to good works in this world. I like to watch him, because he is of most direct benefit to myself. He does the public work of the nation by which I prosper. 'England,' he says, 'has the noblest and most widely spread civilization in the world. It must be perpetuated, improved, and extended.' So he takes a rifle, or a battleship, and protects me. He passes wise and humane laws for the amelioration of the poor. I pay for them, it is true, but they keep the poor more or less contented, and I should have to pay much more if the poor ameliorated themselves. He puts a policeman at my door, gives me good roads



to drive down and a sanitary `city` to live in. I am indebted to the man who finds his vocation in public life: he gets his reward by being made a peer or a cabinet minister, but he has to work very hard for it, and I get the chief benefit from first to last. There is a great deal to be said for being a parasitic growth on a highly organized society, Johnny. That is my position, and I get my amusement in life by looking at my neighbors and wondering whether they have made as good a bargain with the world as I have."

"And you are contented with the world as it is? And with the place you occupy in it?"

"Perfectly. Aren't you?"

"Oh, very fairly. In the matter of 'facing fearful odds for the ashes of my fathers and the temples of my gods,' I am a fair sample of a parasite myself, and have no ambition to undertake the toil and responsibility of earning myself a page in the history of England for the twentieth century. My only complaint about the world is that most of the color and romance have gone out of it. We have ceased to have any emotions and our lives are the poorer for it."

"What emotions do you want?"

John Stanford walked to the bookcase and picked out Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights."

"You know the story of the Suicide Club?" he asked.

Cyril nodded.

"You remember old Mr. Malthus, who came night after night and gambled for his life because



*Fear* was the only emotion which had any effect on his wornout system, when wine and women, love and hate and avarice left him cold?"

"Is this blank verse?"

"Don't interrupt; you've spoiled my period. His final dissipation was the excitement of drawing a card which, in all human probability, sooner or later, would lead to his violently murdering, or being violently murdered, by a fellow-member in cold blood. It is a fantastic story, but the moral is sound. You and I never have experience of what fear is. Adventure and risk of death never come our way. The immunity is part of the highly organized civilization of which we are parasites. It is the reward we win or the price we pay for civilization, whichever way you like to regard it."

"Well?"

"Well." John Stanford laughed. "All this is leading up to the confession that I have joined the Samurai."

"The ungodly—in the dignified form of Lord Darlington and his latest disciple—have hemmed me in, I say, on every side. Why have you done this thing, Johnny?"

"There is a mediæval and romantic flavor about the thing that appealed to me. All right, I won't try to convert you, but the idea of the New Chivalry attracts me. What do you think of my decision?"

"The other Samurai have my sympathy: you are excluded therefrom. Oh, if the thing amuses



you, that is your justification. I admit that the prospectus left me quite cold; I don't want to join a 'brotherhood organized for social service,' or to 'regulate the scattered and too often dissipated influence for good that exists in each one of us.' 'The Sight of Suffering' and other alliterative phrases fall on deaf ears in this case. I make it a rule never to see suffering; for me, suffering and poverty do not exist."

"That's because you don't look for them, and because you shut your eyes when they come your way."

"My case, my lord. When the world is simply crowded with beautiful things to see, to hear, to smell, to touch, to taste, it is nothing but perverted ingenuity to go in search of squalor and pain and hunger: evil sounds, evil smells, evil sights. The only suffering I know is that which comes over me when I reflect on the transitory nature of it all, and between ourselves, I don't let that distress me as much as an artist in life should do."

He dragged himself out of the chair and strolled to the window.

"Look at that afternoon sunlight on the river, Johnny: the finest color God ever put into the world. It will last another ten minutes, possibly fifteen. Look at these flowers—May roses. Smell them. Fresh this morning, and to-morrow cast into the oven."

He went back to his chair and dropped into the gentle drawl which for a moment he had abandoned.



"And you bid me give up the beauties of the world and leave my sunset and my flowers in order to play whist with greasy cards in an East End settlement."

"On the contrary, I did no such thing. I bound myself not to try to convert you. Darlington will do that. I only want to point out that your pleasure is purely sensual: it is pleasure of the eye and ear and tongue, and not of the soul."

Cyril laughed.

"*You* talk to me of soul! My definition of soul is a sense of beauty: at least that is good enough to give you something to think over. The soul of a Samurai is nothing but fatty degeneration of the conscience. They can't read a book, smoke a cigar, or look at a picture without wanting to rush off to an unsavory slum and force these benefits upon others. It may be good Christianity, I have no special knowledge; but this I know, that as æsthetics it is beneath criticism and censure and contempt."

John Stanford started round the room in search of cigarettes.

"I think you're almost qualified for a place in 'Who's Who,' Cyril. 'Fitzroy, Cyril. Born February 27, 1888, youngest son of—etc. Educated Winchester and Christ Church, Oxford. Happily unmarried. Residence, Temple Gardens. Clubs—Cynics and Eden. Telephone, 50000 Holborn. Telegraphic Address, 'Désiré,' London. Occupation: Smelling flowers and looking at sunsets. Sports, pastimes, exercise, recreation or



business—smoking.’ It would make a good notice.”

“My only comment is that it is better to smell flowers than to smell back-alleys in Poplar. By the way, now that you’re a Samurai, will you still be able to dine with me at the Cynics? I ask without prejudice and you must not take this as a veiled invitation.”

“Oh, I think so. You see, Darlington, our High Priest, is a member.”

“True, I had forgotten that.”

“Why do you belong to two clubs? Isn’t the Cynics sufficiently worldly and disillusioned?”

“It is for me, but not for some people, so they founded the Eden and asked me to join.”

“Why the Eden?”

“After a well-known garden of that name, Johnny, where the first inhabitants tasted of the tree of knowledge and became as gods, knowing good and evil—that description fits the members of the Eden: *vice Genesis passim*: we are all as gods there, knowing good and evil. Come and dine sometime if you don’t believe me.”

“Perhaps I will, but not to-night, and that reminds me of the real purpose of my call here, next, of course, to the urgent necessity of getting tea. Are you going to Lady Delaunay’s ball to-night? I fancy she wants all the men she can get.”

“That is an inducement for staying away. You are young and inexperienced, Johnny. You are still agreeably flattered when unknown host-



esses summon you to their routs; in a word, you are still at an age when you allow other people to make use of you. When you are as wise as I am, you will value other people in so far as they contribute to your amusement. Lady Delaunay will no longer be a lady whom it is incumbent upon you to amuse; she will be a lady whose duty it is to see that you pass a pleasant evening which might otherwise have been dull."

"Well, get to the point."

"I cannot answer offhand. I do not know what I shall be doing this evening, or how heavily time may hang on my hands. If I am disengaged and in want of diversion—I might look in. Or, again, I might not."

"Do you keep an engagement book?"

"Yes, it's by the clock."

John Stanford opened the book and turned the leaves. "'April 30th. Oysters go out of season. *Eheu fugaces!*' Is that a social engagement?"

"It is an important division of the calendar. Other people record the deaths of problematic saints and the arrival of quarter-day. I prefer to note the wistful departure of a valued article of diet and the appearance of a persistent and crushing phenomenon like the salmon. But it is no longer the 30th of April, so why torture my mind with the mention of what I may not eat till the first of September?"

"'Arrival of asparagus': 'plovers' eggs at their most plentiful.' Here we are—'Lady Delaunay, 10.00 P. M.' You've no other engagement, so you had better come."



“I will give no undertaking one way or the other, but if—when I have dined and smoked and looked in at Covent Garden—I feel no inclination for bed, it is possible that I may figure at Lady Delaunay’s as one of what the *Morning Post* calls ‘other well-known dancing-men.’ Now I insist on your going, Johnny, or at least leaving me to read in peace till dressing time.”



## CHAPTER II

### DINNER AT THE CYNICS' CLUB

"No more wine? Then we'll push back chairs and talk."

—BROWNING.

AT half-past eight the same evening a tall, thin figure emerged from the gloom of the Temple and, fortified by the presence of lilies of the valley and a cigarette, made its way slowly down the Strand in the direction of Pall Mall. It was nearly nine before Cyril Fitzroy reached his club and contemplated with relief the prospect of dining with the *Westminster Gazette* as sole company. This, however, was not to be, for as he walked up the coffee-room to order dinner, a voice at his side was heard to remark reflectively, "I say unto thee, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these." Cyril turned and met the gaze of Lord Darlington, who was dining with Rodney Trelawney, a young Oxford don. Lord Darlington invited him to join their table.

"Three minutes to order dinner, another three to read the Exchange telegrams, and I will be with you," said Cyril.

"I didn't know you had the honor of Cyril's acquaintance," said Rodney as Cyril walked away.



"I was about to make the same remark to you, Rodney, but on reflection decided not to. It would be like asking you to identify a portrait of the king. Cyril is rapidly becoming a public character. I have known him for a year or two now. In fact, I think I may say I owe my life to him."

"The nation is indebted to him," said Rodney, with an ironical bow. "But it must have gone sorely against the grain. He poses as living for beauty alone and abhorring the merely useful. He also poses as being devoid of all sentiment and emotion. Do please tell me how he came to deny his gods."

"Oh, he did not save my life for love of life-saving. He has often told me—quite politely, of course, he is always polite—that he regards my public work as that of a dangerous and mischievous fanatic. His own efforts at reform, I imagine, would start by way of wholesale demolition."

"Most reform starts by way of wholesale demolition. I remember a discussion in his rooms at Oxford. A number of frivolous undergraduates sketched out what they would do if they were God Almighty for twenty-four hours. We all demolished something. I concentrated on Bletchley Junction, someone else on the statuary of Holborn Viaduct at the Farringdon Street Bridge, someone else selected Balliol and the Meadow Buildings at the House. But Cyril's destruction was on an epic scale. He ranged from Gower Street to the public monuments of Edinburgh



and embraced all the industrial centers of the midlands and north. Even with divine powers it would have been stiff work for twenty-four hours. However, we are losing sight of our original point. How came Cyril to save your life?"

"Oh, he was at a children's party or some such incongruous gathering, and was dancing with Violet, my daughter, you know, when a telegram was brought in to say that I was seriously ill and wanted her and a specialist: our local man was nervous about operating on his own responsibility. The last train had gone, and it looked like taking some time to get a special, so Cyril volunteered to motor Violet and the surgeon down if someone would lend a car. I think the dance was at the Mount-Stuarts, anyway old Mount-Stuart offered his car, Cyril just asked if it were insured, found it was, sent Violet off to change her clothes, rang up the surgeon, lit an abnormally large cigar—so I'm told—and got under way in fifteen minutes from the arrival of the telegram. They must have kept up pretty nearly fifty miles an hour, but even so, only arrived just in time. Arbuthnot—the surgeon—had a look at me, remarked 'appendicitis,' and had it out in about the time you'd take to uncork a bottle. Gangrene had set in even then, and another hour would have been critical."

"What was Cyril's version?"

"Oh, he says that the drive in to Oxford and down the High by moonlight is a sight no man forgets, and as Violet had never seen it, this was



the opportunity. He always swears he meant to knock up a friend at All Souls in order to show Violet the view of the Camera from the Quad, but that she was asleep and he did not like to wake her, as children are so irritable when their sleep is disturbed. Violet denies the sleep, and I rather fancy the whole story is apocryphal. But as regards yourself—you were not up with him, were you?"

"No, I must be his senior by seven or eight years; but his brothers were at the House with me, and I used to go and stay with them."

"Has Cyril always been like this?"

"Like what?"

"Well, has he always followed the cult of flippancy and uselessness? I think it's a pity. It paralyzes his powers of doing any good in the world, though very possibly it adds to his faculty for amusing his friends. He wants a little ego-mania knocked out of him and a little enthusiasm knocked in."

Rodney laughed.

"Cyril would have a lot to say about your definition—whatever it may be—of doing good in the world. He told me the other day that the world had rubbed along without his assistance up to the year 1888, and he saw no reason why it should not rub along a few more years. I think he imagines himself to be a non-moral creature subject to attacks of ennui, which it is his interest to render as few as possible. I don't think he has any ambition to satisfy; he has as much



money as he needs for living in comfort; he reads a great deal, travels a little, enjoys good music, and above all takes an absorbing interest in his fellow-man. Not from any desire to embrace him as a brother, but to catalogue him as a specimen. No—I don't think he has always been quite the present bundle of negations, but I should be hard put to it to name anything that has ever roused his enthusiasm. Except Aubrey Beardsley, but that is quite a distinct pose."

"Oxford is a bad school for a man like that."

"I'm not sure. I don't think it changes you. Your mind is broadened—until you become a don like me—but your primitive instincts are strengthened: and if your instinct is to deride enthusiasm and jeer at the misguided people who run with the boats and that sort of thing, you will just give vent to your derision. It won't be knocked out of you; and similarly, if jeering isn't in your line, it won't be knocked into you. A man gets ten years older before he goes down, but I don't think Oxford changes him. Perhaps it's just as well. It would otherwise make for undue uniformity."

"Marriage will alter Cyril."

"Cyril won't marry. At least, not if I read him aright. He affects to study women as he studies men, in the light of specimens, and sometimes as works of art by an inspired hand. From a sexual point of view he is completely indifferent and extraordinarily coldblooded. I suppose if you live on eggs and nuts and fruit as he does,



and never eat meat or drink wine, your blood does get chilled."

"Well, I'm not sure that I accept your view of him. He likes to give the impression, I grant you, of being quite without emotion or interest, but I fancy it is either an attitude he deliberately assumes, or else that at present he knows no better, and that he has never come across an incentive, be it a woman or what you will, sufficiently strong to rouse him. Whichever it is, I hope for his sake it will be short-lived. He is laying up a pretty cheerless future for himself if he shuts out men and women from his intimate life, and only welcomes them into the laboratory to be dissected and catalogued. It will make him very lonely and selfish, Rodney. Man cannot live by Aubrey Beardsley alone, at least not after he's five-and-twenty."

"Well, here he comes if you want to try your reforming hand on him. I believe if you were God Almighty for twenty-four hours you would order him beer and a porterhouse steak and make him enlist for twelve months."

"I am not sure that it would be at all a bad beginning. Sit down, Cyril, and when you've got some food inside you, attempt in a few words to justify your existence."

"The beauty and simple poetry of my existence are its own justification. But leaving that on one side for a moment, I'm filled with late information on a variety of topics, the eccentric movements of the Bank rate, the condition of Home



rails—neither of which you would understand, Rodney; the score which Kent or some other county made in their first and some later innings, and excerpts from the Prime Minister's speech at Liverpool, where he appears to be striking what the *Daily News and Leader* of to-morrow will call a note of fundamental Liberalism. You, Lord Darlington, I will privately inform that there has been a slump in proconsuls."

"You mean the death of Glenlivet in the Transvaal? That was in the *Times* this morning."

"No, I mean that Rochdale has had to throw up the vice-royalty of India. Nervous breakdown. The dim inscrutable brown man seems to have been hotting it up for him, and the last bomb-throwing appears to have disturbed his peace of mind."

"Nice job for his successor," murmured Rodney. "I wonder who will get it."

"I wonder, rather, who will take it," said Cyril; "would you, Lord Darlington?"

"India? Most certainly if it were offered me."

"What will you do about Violet? I suppose two will make a better mark for fancy shooting, but it seems a pity to sacrifice her in the cause of empire. Your views, of course, I regard as incorrigible. You suffer from what the Catholics pleasantly term invincible ignorance on the subject of kid-glove government for Asiatics, but I have tried hard to enlighten Violet."

Lord Darlington received Cyril's impudence with a smile.



"If I go to India I shall leave Violet behind and appoint you her guardian."

"What about Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, or in other words, your respected but quarrelsome sisters? My life wouldn't be worth an hour's purchase."

"Nor would Violet's if I left her in charge of those—well, I must not call my sisters cats."

"On the contrary, Lord Darlington, you have the fullest liberty from both Rodney and myself to call them what you please. It would be a pretty state of things if a man might not call his own sisters cats. Where then would be the Englishman's much-boasted freedom of speech?"

"Well, India's a long way off, and so is the vice-royalty as far as I am concerned; but I warn you, Cyril, if I go you will have to act as guardian."

"I could hardly have made a wiser choice myself," said Cyril gravely. "And now, Rodney, having disposed of Empire and the Ladies Elizabeth and Rachel Anstruther, not to mention their niece the Lady Violet, will you please inform me what you are doing in this wedding garment in a club of which you are not a member, or—if I may say so without offence—likely to become one. You should be in Oxford, forming the minds of the young and directing the innocent pastimes of their simple leisure."

"Cyril, you put me in mind of 'Enery Straker's remark in 'Man and Superman,' 'I wish I 'ad a car that would go as fast as you talk, Mr. Tanner.'



I'm up here, yes, in full term—I admit it—to go to Lady Delaunay's ball. I imagine you are going there too. Everyone seems to be."

"Thank you for the exclusive flavor you give to my invitation. I may be going. It depends whether I take money off Lord Darlington at bridge. Do you know your hostess?"

"No; do you?"

"I never know my hostess. It only encourages them. But this ignorance on your part is significant, Rodney. To come up from Oxford in mid-term to attend the ball of a lady you don't know—there is something behind it. You are still in pursuit of the Ideal, and for some reason best known to yourself you expect to meet her in St. James's Square."

"What—or perhaps I should say who—is Rodney's Ideal?" asked Lord Darlington in some amusement at the sparring of the two young men. They formed a contrast with many points of similarity. Rodney, excitable and thin in the skin, a man on wires, easily irritated and quickly betrayed into saying something he would afterwards regret; Cyril, thin and ascetic, but studiously calm and deliberate in utterance, weighing every word, and in conversation always giving the impression of a meaning held back and concealed under the obvious structure of his well-rounded sentences.

"Rodney has flung 'Enery Straker at my head and I will retaliate with Andrew Undershaft. Like all young men, he greatly exaggerates the



difference between one young woman and another. This leads him to imagine a hierarchy leading up to the Ideal. This latter has never been clearly defined, but she is to have transcendent beauty, countless wealth, ripe wisdom and ready wit. When found, Rodney will condescend to ask her to marry him. So far he has only got to the point of giving her rich and expensive cakes at Rumpelmayers."

Rodney flushed under the fire of Cyril's slow drawl, and at the last word sat upright.

"What is the objection to Rumpelmayers?"

"None that I know of, my boy, except that the cakes are too rich for my impaired digestion. I never go there. I go to a flat hard by where a young friend of mine occupies an eligible suite of rooms, and insures your life in quicker time than you would take to pick a pocket. That, however, is a harmless foible easily disposed of either by taking out a policy or by saying as I did that I had been refused by every other office in London for perforated lungs and unremitting hemorrhage. He plays the piano very nicely and composes waltzes in unguarded moments. I go there when I want to be soothed, and I was being wooed into blissful oblivion of the world and its wicked way this afternoon when I was brought abruptly back to stern realities by the sight of Rodney and the Ideal making tracks for the cup that cheers not."

Cyril paused a moment to enjoy his friend's discomfiture, and then added:



"Of course, Rodney, if you didn't want to be seen and I'd known that, I'd never have looked."

"For Heaven's sake stop talking, Cyril," said Lord Darlington, "and get on with your dinner, or I'll call the head waiter and have you put at a separate table. The walls of an isolation hospital would cry aloud to Heaven for relief if you got inside them and began talking. I asked you to join this table because I wanted to point morals and adorn tales. Look round at the people dining here to-night and take warning. It is time you got married."

"Which am I to look at, Lord Darlington, the married men seeking relief from the nightmare of domesticity, or the unmarried men coyly refusing its advances? The unmarried men, I see. Rodney, we are in the same boat here. If you don't give up looking for the Ideal, and if I don't start out in your footsteps, you see what you are going to become in about a hundred and fifty years' time, according to Lord Darlington. Take your choice, my boy, and pick out the Awful Example who particularly takes your fancy. I rather fancy Everard myself."

Rodney followed the direction of Cyril's laughing eyes to a table where his uncle was seated. Everard Fitzroy was a man of fifty, a bachelor of ample means and generous proportions. At the moment he was performing prodigies of surgery on a kipper savory, his elbows sturdily raised above his head and his single eyeglass dropping greasily from time to time among the bones.



"Will Everard do for you, Rodney? He's my ideal of a bachelor and realizes more perfectly than any man I know the Palmerstonian title of a gay, eupeptic son of Belial. I always call him that myself, and I know it to be a source of much inward gratification to him. If you don't like him, I can offer you substitutes almost as good as the real thing."

Cyril gazed round the room for a time as if he were hypnotized.

"There's something in your argument, Lord Darlington, but it's an argument that won't hold any great volume of water. If you like, we'll have a competition: you play your worst examples of bachelors and I'll trump your tricks with the married men. We can do you a nice line in married men, Rodney, something to knock spots off the bachelors. There's Duckworth, the little whiskered creature in a frock coat. Don't, Rodney, I beg of you, seek consolation in side-whiskers. Duckworth tries to compensate himself for the absence of his wife by standing all day in the passage upstairs behind the smoking-room door, waiting for bashful junior members like myself to hurry out and knock him down. Then we pick him up and he makes us apologize. Take Hamilton, at the next table to Duckworth; his mission in life is to collect all the illustrated weeklies, sit on them and go to sleep. If you don't like him, take Marklore in the window, the man who——Oh! don't go, Lord Darlington, I was just getting into my stride."



“Rodney, I am going to smoke a cigar in the gallery. If you can prevail on Cyril to behave like a rational creature, you may bring him. Otherwise you may choose between staying with him and coming with me.”

“Oh, please, Lord Darlington, let me come with you,” said Cyril; “I will be a model of sweet reasonableness.”

Lord Darlington took his arm.

“If I weren’t an old and respected member of this club, Cyril, I’d smack your head. Who on earth proposed you as a member?”

“Well, you did for one, but there was such a mob of supporters that one more or less hardly counted. Come on, Rodney, and thank me for saving you the ‘thirteenthly and lastly’ of the Rev. Lord Darlington’s few well-chosen words.”

No reply was vouchsafed until coffee and cigars had been ordered and the three were comfortably ensconced in armchairs round the gallery fireplace. Then Lord Darlington took up the parable.

“Seriously, Cyril——”

“Seriously, Lord Darlington, you have the advantage of me—I am neither an earl nor an Oxford don, and for me to speak seriously argues an arrested development. Experiment on Everard, who shows every menacing sign of joining our party. Everard is intensely sober-minded. Most of his spare time is spent in volunteering didactic advice to people who fancy they are already conducting their business with prudence and foresight. He convinces them of their error.



He tells the Bar how to secure briefs and the City how to increase its dividends. Cabinet ministers hang on his lips, and experienced housekeepers discharge their cooks at his bidding. He closes more doors to himself in London by his flow of helpful counsel than I could ever hope to do by a lifetime of detrimental conduct. At his age I shall doubtless do the same. I admit that the odd trick goes to you, Lord Darlington. Everard, come here and be sacrificed. Lord Darlington is playing the *Sieur de Malétroit* for one night only, and insists on someone being married *pour encourager les autres*. You are regarded as a lusty miscreant whose salad days of bachelordom go back to a time when I was aglow with youthful spanks and Rodney still muled and puked in his nurse's arms."

"I cannot allow my name to be mentioned in connection with marriage, even seriously. I will deal with the matter in the abstract, or at least with one aspect. Why is it that no three men can meet in a club without discussing one or more of three topics—their stomachs, their other ailments, and matrimony? That is the order of conversation, but marriage rapidly rises like a queen bee and slays all rivals. Before the fish is removed there is a *sauve qui peut* and a descent to personalities. The Mikado has decreed an execution, and Koko, Pooh Bah, and Nankipoo all start talking at the same time to point out the eminent fitness of the other for the envied position, and their own pitiful unworthiness. For



anything I know to the contrary, the practice started in the Garden of Eden, between Adam and the Serpent, and the glorious tradition has been preserved unbroken ever since."

"I don't think much of your ally, Lord Darlington."

"I don't think much of your uncle, Cyril. He is old enough to know better. How old are you, Everard?"

"Oh, a lot less than that, Darlington, and I grow younger every day. Contact with people like Cyril and Rodney makes me feel strangely juvenile and undeveloped."

"Contact with Cyril makes me feel glad that I was born in another and doubtless duller generation." Lord Darlington was showing signs of irritability. "I am sick of the posing of the present day; sick to see men of ability and position wasting the best years of their life in absolute futility. These neurotics are too busily engaged in studying their own morbid symptoms and gloating over them, ever to imagine they have a public duty to perform. They regard it as in-artistic to work at a profession, they are too indolent for parliament or the public services, and too selfish to do man's primary duty of raising up a decent healthy family for the state. Nothing is more contagious than affectation of this kind, and a man like Cyril has an incalculable power of harm. A dozen fools will follow like sheep and believe in the literal truth of nonsense which Cyril, with all his faults, is still capable of recog-



nizing as nothing but nonsense. I tell you that what you young men want is a moral cold bath, and if you don't get it soon I'm sorry for the future of your country, but above all I'm sorry for your own future. The men won't put up indefinitely with your damned superiority and indifference, the women will get tired of your hypochondria, and then you'll be left before you're thirty with nothing to do but nurse an enlarged liver and your own intolerable conceit."

"The Earl of Darlington starts out to curse and stays to bless." Cyril got up and knocked the ash off his cigar. "There was a moment to-night when I threw myself into the future and saw a middle-aged and friendless bachelor, fat and embittered, living at the club sixteen hours out of the twenty-four and spending fifteen of those sixteen in the contemplation or realization of food. For a blinding moment my mental balance was overturned, and for a word I would have walked out and asked the first woman I met to save me from such a fate. The peroration—like all perorations—spoiled the speech. We ineffectual poseurs have one duty only towards the state, and that is to strangle the succession. Good-night, Lord Darlington, and a health to your Samurai; good-night, Rodney, prosperity to you in your search for the Ideal. Everard, you had better come with me. An altercation is impending, and you might be converted and deny your glorious manhood. I am going to Covent Garden for the last act of 'Pelleas.' There will



be room for you in the Morants' box. Thence to Lady Delaunay's ball to gaze on the fresh, fair faces of those who might have been mine, had I the heart to spring a race of neurotic hypochondriacs on my uncomplaining motherland."

Lord Darlington watched Cyril Fitzroy and his uncle strolling away arm-in-arm down the stairs, and turned to Rodney with a smile.

"A fairly hopeless couple, aren't they, Rodney?" he remarked. "I think there must be a taint in the Fitzroy blood somewhere. I've known Everard for twenty years and hardly hope to reform *him*, but it is a little staggering to find in Cyril at twenty-three a pocket edition of his uncle at fifty. Strange and wonderful creatures are the Fitzroys."

"In what way?"

"Well, take Everard. He made enough money before he was thirty to relieve him of the necessity of doing a hand's turn for the rest of his life, and with the remorseless logic of the Fitzroy brain he *has* done no work since. He lives in Egypt or Algiers during the winter and on the coast of France during the summer. The spring he spends in England, playing bridge, dining at the club, giving an exhibition of some of the worst golf in the three kingdoms, and dropping oracular pronouncements in the course of domestic politics. He has friends in the ministry with whom he discourses learnedly, and I believe he really fancies that they drink at the fount of wisdom which he offers them and shape their policy accordingly."

"A harmless life, at any rate."



"I don't agree. It is bad to see a man of his ability deliberately resolving to be useless, it is bad to see a young man like Cyril trying to walk in Everard's footsteps, and it is bad to see Everard's own degeneration."

"But his own degeneration is surely a matter which concerns him alone."

"Unfortunately, no. It is practically impossible to anyone to avoid exerting a certain amount of influence on his neighbors, but when a man of malice aforethought goes out of his way to interfere with everyone he meets, he has the makings of a fair public nuisance. Everard is a clever and observant man with quite a talent for discovering the weak place in others and a mischievous love of making remarks which he knows will cause unnecessary pain. After a few years one either ignores him or quarrels with him; I ignore him, but most of his relations have quarreled with him. He talks to women of the tragedy of growing old and fat, tells husbands that they are trodden under foot by their wives, tells the wives that they don't know how to bring up their children, tells the children that it was a lamentable day for the world and themselves when their parents met. And he is nearly always right. Then when he has exhausted his quiver, he packs his bag and retires into solitude for six months to play golf, strum on the piano, and mature a fresh stock of mordant sarcasms for the occasion of his next entry into society."

"And are you afraid of Cyril becoming like that when he is Everard's age?"



“That, or something like it. At present he rather ostentatiously refuses to interest himself in anyone’s affairs but his own. How long that will last I cannot say. I want to get him settled to the collar before he has time to develop any more Fitzroy characteristics.”

“What about the other members of the family?”

“You mean Cyril’s brothers? I don’t know them so well. Hugo was dining here to-night and may possibly join us later on. The other I have only met once.”

“He and Cyril stand at opposite poles. Cyril always speaks of him as the most perfectly preserved example of palæolithic man—which is another way of saying that Arthur’s ideas are a little out of date. I suppose they are somewhat; anyway, Cyril is a source of constant anxiety to him, and Arthur lives in an atmosphere of exposures, actions for breach of promise, family scandals, and so forth, with the divorce court or bankruptcy court never more than ten minutes from his mind.”

“I imagine the effect on Cyril is rather less than nothing?”

“Exactly. Do you remember a remark of Dr. Johnson’s about Dr. Taylor? ‘Sir, no man likes to live under the eye of perpetual disapprobation,’ or something of the kind. Dr. Johnson never had the advantage of our young friend’s acquaintanceship or he would have modified his views. I fancy disapprobation is meat and drink to Cyril. He does something more than usually



preposterous and then sits down outside his brother's cave to await developments. Out comes Arthur, a particularly well-nourished specimen of primitive man suitably attired in goatskin, club, and gold pince-nez. He talks long and sadly about the life Cyril is leading and the end to which it will infallibly bring him. Then when the whole treasury of ripe Stone Age wisdom has been lavishly expended, he picks up his club and returns to his cave, while Cyril scores a mark in the sand to show that there has been a safe draw. The whole thing has been pictorially represented by Hugo, who shows signs of developing into a black and white artist of the most libelous order."

"Talk of an angel." Lord Darlington had caught sight of Hugo Fitzroy and a friend walking in the direction of the card-room. "It would be a pity not to complete our study of the Fitzroy family when we have another example of it so close at hand." He called over the gallery, and the two men deflected their course in his direction. "Do you know young Mortimer Forrest, Rodney? He's an old Bailey barrister and one of the shining lights of my Samurai."

"I know him slightly. He cultivates the oldest and most responsible court manner of anyone I have ever met. To see him finger a purely decorative pair of glasses, hammer the groaning dinner-table, and exclaim, 'In cases like these you can't get a jury to convict,' and similar phrases, makes you feel that the oldest King's Counsel has still something of criminal procedure to learn at the feet of Mortimer Forrest."



Lord Darlington smiled and turned to the newcomers.

"Rodney is making game of your ultra-professional manner, Morty. You had better defend it, or better still, explain for the benefit of posterity how it may be acquired."

"Simplest thing in the world," interposed Hugo Fitzroy, selecting a chair. "Morty never answers letters and seldom turns up to dinner when he is most expected. His friends are then left to console themselves with the belief that he must have a practice of bewildering dimensions to make him so careless of the ordinary usages of polite society."

Morty Forrest sighed wearily and addressed himself to Lord Darlington.

"You brought it on yourself, Lord Darlington, by asking Hugo to join you. Haven't you had enough of the Fitzroys yet? I saw you were talking to Everard and Cyril half an hour ago; you mustn't let this sort of thing become a morbid craving."

"Rodney and I are just taking a run through the family to try to find one Just Man. We thought Hugo might fill the bill."

"I feel I have better qualities for the part than Everard or Cyril," remarked Hugo. "But what is required of the Just Man, and what reward does he reap?"

Rodney took upon himself to answer. "He is required to marry a wife in order to keep him from becoming like his uncle Everard, and to



join the Samurai and devote himself to becoming a useful member of society to prevent him growing like his young brother Cyril."

"And the reward?"

"Is it not enough reward, is it not sufficient cause for thanksgiving to escape those two fates?"

"It is an intangible and negative reward. I do not propose to become like Everard or Cyril in any case."

"You can't escape it unless you take yourself in hand and adopt the proper precautions. That was the gist of Lord Darlington's homily to Cyril at dinner."

"And the proper precautions are marriage and the Samurai?"

"Leaving marriage on one side for the moment, what—without prejudice—is involved by the Samurai?"

"You must get Lord Darlington to tell you. I am only a lay brother."

"Do you want to know, seriously and not for the purpose of cheap witticism?" asked Lord Darlington.

Hugo nodded.

"Well, I will try to explain it."

Lord Darlington leaned forward and addressed himself to the three young men whose armchairs formed a semicircle before him. He spoke slowly and without undue warmth, depending on the subject-matter to interest his hearers, without having recourse to a highly colored vocabulary, an emotional voice or a gesticulating manner.



He carried them back a quarter of a century to a night when he and two friends were discussing their futures and the future of their country, in the rooms at Oxford which he was on the eve of quitting for the last time. They had been brought together by a common interest in philanthropic work and were wondering to what extent the new life upon which they were all entering would interfere with the work they had begun and desired to carry to a conclusion. And as they talked on into the early morning, he had laid before them a scheme which was to satisfy their own requirements and furnish an outlet for all the disinterested and generous impulses which were to be found in men of their age and position. They were to found a brotherhood of Samurai, and their mission should be to offer the example of a new way of life and make a new nation of England. He had told his friends that the cleavage between classes was becoming daily more pronounced: the poor knew as little of the rich, the way they lived and the services they rendered, as the rich knew of the poor and their conditions and requirements. England was not one nation but several, and it was the task of the Samurai to learn and teach. They were to gather together the young men of the country before age had crystallized their habits or disillusion damped their ardor, and each was to spend according to the number of his talents.

He told them of the early history of the brotherhood, how in spite of rebuffs and humiliations they



had persevered, how an ever-increasing number of enthusiasts had gone to the Samurai settlement, living with the poor and studying their life. They had faced the problems of poverty one by one, explaining in high places the urgency of reform and in the East End the difficulties with which reform was compassed about. Statistics had been compiled, lectures delivered throughout the land, from time to time a member of the brotherhood had been elected to parliament and had built there on the foundations laid in the settlement. There had been Laodiceans in that community as in every other, but it was worth noting how few failed to be infected with the enthusiasm of their fellow-workers, and of those who turned back, how many found that the work exercised over them a fascination which led them to plunge afresh into its midst. And the enthusiasm had not been all on one side. As the work of enlightenment went on, it had been possible to clear away much of the mutual suspicion with which poor and rich had been wont to regard each other. The ideals of modern policy had been expounded, and the difficulties, too, which the statesmanship of the best brains in the land were trying to surmount.

The sphere of their activities was not limited. Anyone might propound a suggestion for improving the conditions of modern civilized life and setting a higher ideal before his fellow-man. The names were mentioned of some who had devoted their energies to reforming the course of



education in the universities, of others who had given themselves up to the cause of international peace. Many of the Samurai after their novitiate never found time to visit the settlement, but their work went on the world over and the enthusiasm which they had drunk in during those first few years never left them.

Lord Darlington turned to Hugo Fitzroy.

"Come and see us and we will find work for you to do. What is more, we will make you want to do it. You will fall under the spell as Morty has done, and Rodney, and a score more of your friends. Many people come to us doubting and jeering, listless and uninterested, but no man has ever remained indifferent after a week with us." He leaned back in his chair with shining eyes.

"I'll come, Lord Darlington, but I don't know that I can do much good."

"So long as you come, I will answer for our success in extracting all the good which bounteous providence has put into you. Cyril is almost my only failure, and I believe that I could put enthusiasm into *him* if he would only cross our threshold."

"That's what he's afraid of," said Rodney. "To quote one of Wilde's characters, 'Argument is always vulgar and often convincing.' Be content with having secured one member of a very unpromising family as a convert."

"Ah, but I want Cyril too."

"He would be flattered if he knew how large a part he played in your schemes for the regeneration of mankind. Why is he so important?"



Lord Darlington's face grew grave.

"Do you read Balzac? Good. Until a man has read the 'Comédie Humaine' his education has not begun. You remember Vautrin, the escaped convict, whose passion it was to dominate society? He could not do it in his own person, so he sought a young man and labored to bring him into a commanding position, impress his personality upon him and enjoy the vicarious triumphs of an adopted son. I feel rather like Vautrin. I've got no son of my own now, but I see Cyril so much in my house that at times—when he's not been annoying me as he did to-night—I almost begin to look upon him as my own son and to think what I could do if I were able to graft my ideas and enthusiasms on to him. I shall soon be fifty, and the younger men will have to be preparing to take the reins. However, as you say, Rodney, I've secured one convert to-night, and we won't discuss the Samurai any more till he's seen them at work. What does anyone say to a game of bridge?"

Rodney looked at his watch. "Not for me, I am afraid. I promised to get to Lady Delaunay's at eleven sharp, and it's a quarter to, now."

"Well, there's time for a cigarette and a little whiskey first." He called a waiter, and threw his cigarette case to Rodney. "The young man of the present day is less gallant than he used to be. When I was your age I never dared smoke before going to a ball for fear of making my clothes smell of tobacco. I notice that our friend



Cyril always smokes a larger and stronger cigar than usual in preparation for the fatigues of ball-dancing. I had to speak to him about it last week."

"What did he say?"

"What you might have expected him to say. 'If people wish to dance with me, they must be prepared to make some sacrifices.' What are you looking for—a match?" He threw one which was lost to view under the chair. "I had better throw you the box."

Rodney assumed an attitude as similar to that of a wicket-keeper as was consistent with a recumbent position in an armchair, and remarked, "Hard in to the wicket!" It was an unwise order to give. If four years at the House had taught him nothing else, they should have taught him that a well-filled box of club matches striking the hands with considerable force will in nine cases out of ten explode with vigor and illumination. Rodney jumped from his chair with an ill-suppressed yell, dropping the blazing match-box and kicking it from the carpet into a neighboring fireplace. Lord Darlington hastened to him with profuse apologies.

"My dear Rodney, I am so sorry! I had no idea it would go off; I hope you're not hurt."

"Not personally, thanks. I think the carpet is the main sufferer." There was an unmistakable smell of burning and he bent down to investigate it, catching sight as he did so of a yellow mark on the right knee of his trousers. He brushed it



with his hand and the mark yielded to treatment with a promptitude as unexpected as it was undesired, by retiring from view and leaving a circular hole the size of half a crown through which gleamed the whiteness of a silk undergarment.

"That's finished it," he remarked plaintively. "Can anyone tell me of any place in London where I can procure a reasonably well-fitting pair of ready-made dress trousers at 10.55 P.M.?"

Mortimer Forrest roused himself with an effort and momentarily abandoned the air of extreme lassitude which he felt to be demanded of one whose day has presumably been spent in attendance on an extensive and exhausting court practice.

"Never buy when you can borrow, Rodney. See rather whether we can't fix up something between us. Hugo, you're too broad in the beam. Why do the Fitzroys, with the single exception of Cyril, become so gross in early middle life? Lord Darlington, you're not tall enough. It looks as if it would have to be me. Rodney, I boast the glorious circumstance of possessing four pairs of dress trousers still moderately innocent of any art-green shades. One pair I am wearing, three I sent this morning to be pressed, and they ought to be back by now. Come with me and I will make you free of them, one pair to wear and two to be left in the cloak-room with your spare collar and waistcoat. And if they're still at the tailor's, I will divest myself of man's



last privilege—the right to wear trousers—and you shall wear them in my stead.”

“It’s very good of you, Morty. Where are you living now?”

“Kensington.”

“Kensington?” murmured Hugo, knowing it to be a tender subject. “Ah, I remember now, down in the west of England, where the dialect songs come from. Don’t go there, Rodney, you’ll be lost or waylaid by highwaymen. Why not drive down to the Temple, knock up Cyril’s man, and steal a pair of Cyril’s nether garments?”

“Yes, but what if the man isn’t there?”

“Then I can’t help you, as I haven’t a key to his rooms. You won’t be in a worse position anyhow—except by about a quarter of an hour, as you can then accept Morty’s offer. You’re going to be late, in any event. If you’re lucky and can get into Cyril’s place, you will only be a quarter of an hour late. If you go with Morty you’ll be at least an hour late.”

Rodney turned to Mortimer Forrest.

“I think I’ll try the Temple first, Morty, and fall back on you if I’m out of luck there. Good-bye, all of you. Many thanks, Lord Darlington, for a most admirable dinner.”

He disappeared down the stairs, ran across the hall and into the street.

“What a thing is youth!” remarked Hugo. “Or rather, in Rodney it is arrested development. He is a year older than I am, and yet rather than sacrifice a night’s rest to elbowing a crowd in an



overheated room, I would gladly burn one pair of dress trousers nightly."

"Rodney's case is rather unusual to-night," said Lord Darlington confidentially. "I happen to know that he is going to receive an answer to a certain question, and that the answer will secure or destroy his happiness for life, as the sentimental novelists say."

"Good heavens!" Hugo jerked himself upright in his chair. "This is most distressing news, Lord Darlington. Who is the unfortunate woman? what is she like? and how has she been able to succeed where so many have failed?"

"One question at a time. I know her by name, though I am not at liberty to reveal it. Rodney says she has all the virtues and graces ever put into woman, but not having seen her I am unable to check the accuracy of the description. How she has been able to capture his wayward affections I also cannot say, but I demur to the word 'unfortunate' in connection with her and cannot agree that it is distressing news."

"You forget, Hugo, that the Samurai alone will not save a man," interposed Mortimer Forrest. "Marriage is another necessity of salvation, and as soon as Lord Darlington has fairly taken you in hand, you will have to begin looking about for a wife."

"I have been looking for a wife without intermission for ten years. Indeed, I have even tried to simplify the quest by drawing up a short table of questions: 'What is your income? Do you



snore? Do you talk at breakfast? Do you permit haddock or yellow chrysanthemums at breakfast? What rules do you adopt about fresh air and open windows? In the event of our having only one bathroom, how long will you occupy it in the morning?" There are several more, but I have left the list at home, as I did not expect to want it to-night. Between ourselves, I may tell you that no woman I have ever met has survived even the first column."

"And so, in spite of the most laudable and persistent endeavors, you remain a bachelor?"

"I do, and there is a special poignancy about my case. I am the only person of my acquaintance who is deliberately and cold-bloodedly trying to get married. And I can't bring it off. People like Cyril set their faces against the institution and some of them succeed in remaining single, but most people are like Rodney and Morty: they don't in the least want to get married, but they drift into it without being able to justify their position at any single moment. I feel very sorry for myself."

"I am sure Lord Darlington and I sympathize with you. At a time when the world is overstocked with women it is distressing to see a deserving and desirous man simply becoming shop-soiled for want of a purchaser. It is different for me; I can't afford time or money to get married."

"What nonsense you men talk," said Lord Darlington with a laugh. "The first mistake you



make is in thinking you can get a wife without working for her, and the second is in fancying you can work without a wife. The young man of the present day is too luxuriously brought up, habituated to too many comforts which he grows to regard as necessary to his life. Consequently he spends several years looking for a rich wife who will enable him to marry without sacrificing any of the material comfort to which he has been accustomed. Well, take it from me that the number of rich women in England is strictly limited, and the number of rich women prepared to marry practicing barristers as yet not in sight of the bench or the woolsack is smaller still. That's my first word of wisdom to you, and the second is this. You will none of you do decent work till you've got a wife to work for: the best years of Jacob's life were the ones when he was laboring for Leah and Rachel, and it is the same with both of you. Money by itself is not a sufficient stimulus, nor the good things of this world which money buys. Every year that you put off taking the step you will become blunted and narrowed; nature, which intended you to marry, will punish you for not marrying, and in the end you will become like some of the members of this club—Everard for example. But when you've got wives who will share in your triumphs and your troubles, rejoicing with you when you want to rejoice and comforting you when you need comfort; when you feel that every brief you hold is adding to the happiness and prosperity of your



wife and children, then you will work with a zest that is now quite unknown to you. That is why I hope to-night is going to be a turning-point in Rodney's career, and why I believe that marriage will be the only thing capable of turning Cyril to useful account in this world."

"Yes, but I always think the real difficulty lies here; I have never met the woman with whom I thought I could live in even moderate harmony for more than three weeks, let alone for a lifetime which we should both spend in finding new incongruities in the other. And if I did meet her I am not at all sure that she could put up with more than about a fortnight of my company. As for finding a woman whom I should feel to be necessary to me—without whom my life would be incomplete and purposeless—well, so far I am happily unconscious of the aching void."

"Ah, but Lord Darlington's right." Mortimer Forrest spoke with a conviction worthy of an Old Bailey defence. "The great workers of the world have drawn their inspiration from woman, and I believe that without women the flows of inspiration will run dry. I feel it to be so in my case. I have taken my inspiration, my stimulus to do my best work, from different sources at different times. I worked under the spell of music: that was short-lived. I think the stimulus was too purely sensual. Then I tried working in the Samurai settlement: I drew inspiration from there for a time—but I feel it is losing its grip on me, or my emotions are less responsive.



At one time I derived my whole motive power from religion and an ornate ritual, but that is passing, and by a process of exclusion I come to think that in marrying a wife—as Lord Darlington says—I shall find the sympathy and stimulus I need. Anyway, it is worth trying. If we don't like it—we can make tracks for the divorce court."

Lord Darlington interposed.

"You're not giving marriage a fair trial if you regard the divorce court as even a possibility. Speaking eugenically, there is no greater harm which you can do to your children than to deprive them of the educative influence of one of their parents. You will never learn to love your wife if at the back of your mind you are feeling that at the first difference of opinion you can dissolve partnership."

"It is rather a difficult point; eugenics and religion come in conflict. Eugenically, I think man probably produces a better stock by consorting with numerous women and drawing inspiration from several sources than if he confines himself to one. The teaching of the Church is against such a theory, I know."

"Well, Morty," said Hugo, "have you got over my difficulty of finding a woman you could tolerate for a fortnight, or one who could tolerate you for a week?"

"Not yet. I admit my requirements are exacting. I want someone who is musical, to come with me to 'Monday Pops.' And somebody who



is interested in social work and will come to the settlement on Tuesdays——”

“It looks like freckles, red hair, and spectacles,” remarked Hugo.

“Exactly, and that I could not stand. I can draw no inspiration from freckles and red hair. On Wednesday I should want her to come out with me to dinner and a theatre and possibly go on to a ball. On Thursday we should devote ourselves to the domestic fireside. Can you suggest any likely candidates, Hugo?”

“What about Mildred Langley? Oh, I forgot, she’s your cousin and eugenically she is ruled out.”

“Not necessarily. If I inherit my father’s characteristics and she inherits her father’s characteristics, we don’t make any call on the blood of our mothers, which is our sole physical affinity. Cousin marriage is not barred *in toto* by eugenics. But Mildred would not have me. She’s an Evangelical and I’m a Catholic. On Fridays I should want her to attend Compline.”

“If you married her sister Audrey there would be no difficulty about that; to get a husband Audrey would embrace any doctrine which the fertile mind of man has ever devised.”

“Yes, I think Audrey would say, ‘Morty is worth a Mass.’ But I am not marrying Audrey just at present. I hardly feel I should stand the wear and strain of such a union.”

As he finished speaking a page boy approached with a message.



"Beg pardon, sir, but there's a gentleman outside in a taxi, asking for you most particularly."

Mortimer jumped up and made for the staircase.

"Good-night, Lord Darlington; it is still the Quest of the Holy Trouser. Good-night, Hugo; don't let Lord Darlington carry you out of your depth, or if he does, remember that I can only spare time to act as best man between the hours of one and two-thirty in vacation."



## CHAPTER III

### LADY DELAUNAY'S BALL

"Then I heard a strain of music  
So mighty, so pure, so clear,  
That my very sorrow was silent  
Any my heart stood still to hear."

LADY Delaunay's ball had been upwards of an hour and a half in progress when Everard and Cyril Fitzroy drove into St. James's Square. Scattered couples were cooling themselves in remote corners of the square, to the usual undisguised delight of the London crowd, and one young man, afflicted through life with a craving for the incongruous, was observed to be taking his partner at a smart pace through the objects of historical or other interest from the London library to the house, unmistakably ticketed, where the younger Pitt spent several years of his illustrious existence.

Cyril jumped out of the taxi, paid the driver, and shook his uncle by the hand.

"Now, Everard, our paths diverge. If you insist on coming to this ball it must be without my countenance. You say you know Lady Delaunay and that she will be delighted to see you. Both statements bear the stamp of the



incredible. If she knows you, why does she not invite you? Or rather—why should she invite you? In any case, what possible excuse can you have for saying she will be glad to see you? You have come here for supper, nothing less and nothing more, and I will be no party to subterfuges devised to mask that gross and fleshly consideration.”

Cyril ran up the steps into the house, deposited his hat and coat with a sad but unspeakably dignified functionary in the morning-room, and advanced to receive his hostess's greeting at the head of the stairs. An interval was taking place between the dances and the ball-room wore a deserted appearance. Cyril cast a roving eye round the room and strolled over towards a mirror, before which he observed his friend John Stanford ruefully contemplating the effect of violent exercise, a hot room, and a tendency to embonpoint upon the virginal purity of his collar and shirt-front.

“It's no good, Johnny. Nature will have her revenge. Your gross habits are finding you out. Never mind, you may come and smoke the next dance with me and tell me who's here.”

“Hullo, Cyril, just reserve your personalities till you've done the work I've been through. Débutantes run to lumpiness this season, and I've been filling the breach to some effect since the evening started. Your turn's just coming.”

“My dear Johnny, I am positively here for five minutes only. I came at the eleventh hour to



admire the shirt-fronts of those like yourself who have borne the heat and burden of the débutantes, and now I shall retire discreetly to bed. That is, unless you will come and discuss one or more plovers' eggs with me in the supper-room."

"My dear boy, you mustn't dream of leaving yet. This place is teeming with unsuspected people to whom you will have to offer your manly arm. Besides, Guy is making a tour of the house to find or found a bridge-room and you'd better come and make a fourth. Clarence is coming. Hullo, there goes the music. It's Murano's band and he's in rather good form. I suspect there have been deep and unwise potations."

"Murano tempts me to stay even more than the alluring prospect of bridge with you. Who's there to dance with? I rather fancy the study in brown by the window—no, not that one—there—now you see, with the spray of William Allen Richardsons in her hair. Who is she, Johnny?"

"Oh, that's Myra Woodbridge, Lady Delaunay's niece. The ball's being given in her honor. You'll get no satisfaction there, my boy, she's saving herself up for another."

"Who's the happy man, Johnny? You?"

"No, strange as it may seem, not even me, but Rodney Trelawney. You must have seen them earlier in the season; they were dancing together the livelong evening. I'm prepared to take a small bet that Rodney comes up to scratch to-night."



"A vulgar phrase, Johnny, but I let it pass. What I want to know is why Rodney doesn't come to claim the sweets of victory instead of leaving the adorable Myra to languish in solitude."

"The adorable Myra has been busily employed up to this moment in standing with her aunt at the door and wasting her sweetness on the arriving guests like yourself, numerous as the sand on the seashore and—to her—quite as uninteresting."

Cyril kept his eyes fixed on the subject of their discussion and smiled to himself. If this were the girl who was to satisfy all Rodney's exacting canons and capture his affections after so many years of wayward wandering, she would repay a closer examination than it had been possible to carry out in the moment of time that it had taken her to pass from the curbstone of St. James's Street into Rumpelmayers. At the first glance there was nothing in the appearance of Myra Woodbridge to mark her out from her fellows. She was of medium height, slim and rather pale, with a wealth of light-brown hair parted at the side like a boy's and caught up with a spray of roses at the right ear. The small mouth with its small regular teeth and baffling smile hardly called for comment; the finely molded nose and small ears half hidden by the low sweep of the hair were exactly what would have been expected of the face. The harmony in size and shape and coloring was so perfect as



to be unnoticeable. Cyril reflected critically as he looked at her that it would require the presence of some defect in the regularity of the features to emphasize fully and by contrast their perfect fitness and subtle finish.

If the regular molding of the face were taken as a matter of course and hardly noticed, it is probable that an idle observer would be drawn to look a second time at Myra Woodbridge, to study the eyes and try to fathom the thoughts hidden in their depths. The eyes themselves were remarkable for their unusually rich shade of brown which suffused iris and pupil alike with exceptional warmth: more noticeable still was their owner's habit of using them to look straight into the eyes of anyone with whom she was talking, hardly shifting her gaze for the length of the conversation. Many people were disconcerted by the trick; it gave Myra the appearance of taking more than she gave, and perhaps tearing down a veil here and there that would have been proof against the spoken word. Cyril had the same habit and had been rebuked for it more than once. He wondered idly which diamond would cut the harder.

"Johnny, at least until Rodney's arrival, I propose to dance with the fascinating Myra. Possibly I shall continue after Rodney comes. We must just see how we get on."

"You may take it from me, my dear boy, she will refuse you."

"I will take it from you, Johnny, that she



has already refused you. Nothing more than that. Further, I will show my contempt for your opinion by betting one hundred cigarettes—of a price and brand to be mutually agreed upon—that she takes the next dance with me, and a further fifty that she continues dancing with me for two complete dances after Rodney's arrival. Here's Clarence, he shall hold the stakes."

"'God gie us a gude conceit of ourselves.' My dear boy, I don't bet on certainties. Go and exert your powers of fascination upon the fair Myra. It will be sufficient recompense for Clarence and me to stand here and watch your discomfiture."

Cyril crossed the room without deigning a reply. The waltz was in full swing and the straggling crowd at the door, after a period of neck-craning in search of partners, broke up into couples and was swept into the stream. Myra Woodbridge had retired into the cool seclusion of a balcony and was trying with little apparent success to clasp the rather complicated fastening of her necklace.

"May I be lady's maid, Miss Woodbridge? I saw you were having difficulties."

"And at once rushed to my rescue with a promptitude worthy of a better cause? That was really nice of you. Well, I *should* be grateful if you would fasten this for me. I can't see the catch and my hands are so clumsy in these gloves."

"I imagine the obvious and expected retort



would be to the effect that those fair hands could never be clumsy; but speaking as one intensely complex person to another—I shall refrain from making it. The obvious is too much with us. I have been talking to Johnny Stanford who is morbidly obvious and rather fat. You can see and identify his repartees a mile off.”

Cyril had taken off his gloves as he spoke and now addressed himself to the task of fastening the necklace. The catch was slightly bent and showed a strong objection to performing its function. Cyril had struggled for perhaps two minutes before achieving success, and in the meantime was well aware of the disability under which he labored. His field of vision was confined to the white throat and chin before him, and he was conscious that Myra was employing her leisure in an unhurried contemplation of himself. On the whole, the examination was favorable, though she felt improvement would have been possible in more directions than one. The hair was of a lighter brown than her own and over the temples showed an admixture of gold, but the whole was too fine and silky to be lasting, and Myra fixed forty as the age when he would have to struggle with deadly effort to ward off the hand of a desecrating baldness. Her gaze wandered down over the broad, rather high forehead and rested on the eyes. They were large, almost too large, with the deep blue of the amethyst. Myra marked them as the best feature of the face, qualified by the reflection that the pupil



was continually dilating till the whole eye seemed black, a habit that argued nervous excitability or violence of temper. She wondered which—and decided that it would have been a better face if the eyes had been less hollow, the cheeks less sunken, the nose and mouth less thin and hard. She remembered a phrase of Rodney's, "the face of an early Christian ascetic requiring a background of stained glass," and was weighing the justice of the description, when Cyril snapped the catch and looked up to meet her eyes.

"Well, Miss Woodbridge," he remarked, "what is the verdict to be?"

"The verdict? I did not know I was supposed to be considering one. What is the point at issue?"

"Miss Woodbridge, I own to twenty-three; and I should say you were between seventeen and twenty. You are faced with more than forty years' knowledge of the world and humanity's ways therein, and you dare to pretend ignorance of the problem you have been considering?"

Myra laughed.

"This, I suppose, is the modern version of 'A penny for your thoughts,' the variation from the old consisting in the absence of the penny. If you know my thoughts in the light of your own and my accumulated experience of humanity, you have my full permission to make them public, though I won't promise to gratify your curiosity by saying if the guess is a good one."



"This is not a matter of guessing, my dear lady, it is a matter of certain knowledge. I know I am right without your assurance on the point. All I ask is to be told the result."

"Tell me what the question is and I will try to answer it."

"You concede that there has been a question. That is one point gained. The question you have been considering is simply this—'Is he' (meaning me) 'worth it?'"

"Worth what?"

"Miss Woodbridge, you are *making* difficulties. You shall have the question *in extenso* put into your own lips. 'Here am I momentarily empty-handed. I have finished welcoming my aunt's guests—the Expected One has not yet arrived. A possible Diversion presents itself. Why not dance with the Diversion till the Expected One turns up? Query—Is the Diversion sufficiently amusing? or, in the shorter formula—Is he worth it?' Now the answer, Miss Woodbridge,—Yes, or no?"

"Not in one word; that would be an admission of the accuracy of the question. If you say: Is the Diversion sufficiently amusing for me to dance with? I answer yes, and you may dance with me as long as you can keep me amused."

"You resent my mention of the Expected One, Miss Woodbridge?" Cyril was watching her narrowly.

"Not 'resent' rather 'reject.' There is no Expected One."



"I note the use of the present tense, and before we dismiss the subject forever into oblivion, let me say a word for the defaulter. He is engaged in good work, discussing schemes for my moral regeneration. I dined with him hours ago, and when I went to the opera he and Lord Darlington were warming nicely to the work. Be gracious to him when he comes. I speak disinterestedly, as it will mean curtailing my own share of your programme."

"Before we go any further, let us clear up preliminaries. You apparently know my name, but what am I to call you?"

"You will never get to know me unless you call me Cyril, just as I shall never begin to understand you till I call you Myra. Perhaps you prefer a little distance. In that case it must be Mr. Fitzroy, but I don't think that was the answer you wanted, as you knew my name was Fitzroy long before I told you, and you have probably discussed me at length with Rodney. Rodney discusses me wherever he goes. He holds me out at arm's length as an awful example of what he calls 'Decadence,' and tells people I am without soul and void. That is because I refuse to join the Special Reserve or to take him seriously. But let's leave Rodney and his works behind us. They're starting the 'Rosenkavalier' and it's a crime to miss a bar of it."

An hour later Lady Delaunay approached Everard Fitzroy.

"My dear Everard," she began. "I am so



sorry not to have had a word with you before. I have been busy feeding the dowagers. You are never likely to give dances, Everard, but if you do, remember never to neglect your dowagers. Give them a square meal at eleven and light refreshments every half-hour afterwards. Then they aren't anxious to sit in the ball-room and keep all the windows shut, so the children, poor dears, can get as much ventilation and chills as they like. Now I want supper myself, Everard, and if you've not marked out the beauty of the evening for your own attentions, be charitable and take me down. I have hardly got over my first surprise at seeing you at a ball. I thought you went to bed at about ten—in silk pajamas at £5 a pair, and stayed there for twelve hours out of the twenty-four."

"My dear lady, there is a time for all things. I probably shall spend at least twelve hours in bed when I get there. I am very fond of my bed. But I resent the assumption that at a ball, or indeed anywhere, I am necessarily bound to be out of my element. That is largely why I am here. I have a graceless nephew, who held the theory that I should not be welcome here—I felt compelled to prove the falsity of his words." Everard adjusted his eyeglass and surveyed the room. "Who's the girl in brown going past us now, Lady Delaunay?"

"That's my niece, Myra Woodbridge. I don't think you are quite a suitable person to be introduced, Everard."



"Well, what about the man she's dancing with?"

"I don't know him—but then I know so few of my guests. He looks quite nice, and Myra seems to like him—they've been dancing together for the last hour. I hope he is all right. Do you know him?"

"Know him! He's my own nephew. No shrewd parent or guardian should allow him to cross the threshold. Like myself, he is a detrimental, the complete negation of the purpose for which society exists and for which you give these parties. He is only spoiling the market for others, without meaning to buy himself. I insist that you either introduce me to your niece or else forbid Cyril to go on dancing with her——"

"My dear Everard, come down to supper and don't try to drag that poor innocent-looking boy up to your level of iniquity. Myra will be quite safe enough with him. Your business as an uncle should be to see that he runs no risk with Myra. I regard her as an edged tool, and warn you that I accept no responsibility for anything that takes place between her and your nephew."

"My dear Lady Delaunay, family pride is becoming self-assertive. In any conflict between those two foolish young persons I back Cyril to come off—well—the less damaged of the two. He has had more practice and he has had me as a model."

At the head of the stairs they were met by Rodney Trelawney in a paroxysm of nervous self-abasement.



"Lady Delaunay, accept my sincere apologies for being so late. I have no excuses worth making, and you will probably not believe me if I say I have been engaged up to this moment in idle after-dinner conversation with my host."

"I should believe you, Rodney, whatever you said. It would be lacking in appreciation of your studiously truthful face to do otherwise. Whether Myra will believe you is another question. She is so much cleverer than I am."

"I hope she has not been waiting for me. I feel frightfully guilty, as I promised to be here on the stroke of eleven and it's now past midnight."

"My dear Rodney, you mean you hope she has waited, but are afraid it's too good to be true." Everard surveyed him critically. "And you are right. While you were fiddling, Rome was burning. She has sought consolation elsewhere. Half the novels of the day are based on the failure of forgetful man to meet his chosen one under the clock at Charing Cross in time to catch the boat train for the Continent. I have not, of course, discussed your prospects with Miss Woodbridge, as Lady Delaunay declines to introduce me, but I should say they have no marketable value."

"And now, Lady Delaunay, having inflicted a little unnecessary pain, let us resume our interrupted progress to the supper-room."

Rodney stood aside to make way for Everard Fitzroy's portly figure and then wandered into the ballroom. The waltz was drawing to an end



and he only caught a glimpse of Myra and Cyril before the final chord was struck, but he saw sufficient to feel irritated by Everard's remarks. Myra was dancing with eyes half-closed and head bent forward until it met and touched her partner's. A rebellious strand of hair floated out and kissed his cheek, and on her face was the smile of perfect contentment. Then the waltz ended and Rodney came forward.

"Myra, as I have just told your aunt, I have no excuses worth making. I can only apologize and throw myself on your mercy. Will you spare me a dance as a mark of forgiveness?"

"My dear Rodney, I have nothing to forgive. I gave you up as lost, thought you had decided it was not worth coming to-night and had gone back to Oxford. I'm afraid I'm engaged every dance." Myra spoke with a dangerous sweetness.

"Well, let me have an extra. First extra?"

"I'm engaged for the first extra."

"The second—third—tenth—any one you like?"

"I am afraid I am engaged for the second, the third, the tenth and subsequent extras, should there be any."

"Then in that case I will say good-night. I am going up to Oxford first thing to-morrow morning—this morning rather—and shall not be sorry to get to bed. Will you say good-bye to Lady Delaunay on my behalf?"

"You had better have some supper before you go. It's in full swing now. All the people who came too late for the dancing are showing their



form downstairs. Well, if I don't see you again I'll say good-bye."

"Good-bye, Myra. No, I sha'n't stay for supper, thanks. Good-bye, Cyril."

Rodney walked out of the ballroom and down the stairs, lighting a cigarette as he went. Cyril watched his departure and then turned to his partner.

" 'Hell knows no fury like a woman scorned,' Myra. I think you're unduly hard on him. The Expected One, who is not to be called the Expected One, keeps his lady waiting an hour and is very properly snubbed when he does put in an appearance. All very right and proper, but the tone of your voice—well, Myra, I hope I shall never do anything which will cause you to speak to me like that. You have put a barrier between yourself and Rodney in these last five minutes which all the tears that man has ever shed would be unavailing to wash down. It is a sensitive plant."

"*Tout comprendre est tout pardonner.* Rodney was not coming here in a casual way to dance with me at a given time and there to be an end of it. He asked me to keep myself disengaged at eleven o'clock for reasons which I do not propose to make public, reasons that would possibly not appeal to you, Cyril, but seemed of importance to Rodney and me when we made the arrangement; and then he turns up an hour late without any attempt to excuse himself and coolly asks me for a dance. In my place, you would



have smiled graciously and given him whatever he wanted?"

"In your place—I really do not know. If you were a man you would be so used to women making appointments and not keeping them that an hour's lateness would rank as punctuality. However, Rodney's disgrace prolongs my hour of bliss. One thing only I ask of you. Rodney will call on me at 7 A.M. this morning. He has a passion for matutinal visits and flatters me by sitting on the foot of my bed, making predatory onslaughts on my tea, and asking my advice on the intimate concerns of his daily life. He is occupying my spare room at the Temple, and will infallibly call on me at seven, vaunting his Philistinism in striped flannel pajamas and seeking advice on the position in which you have placed him. I shall tell him to write you a line of apology, and my request is that you neither destroy nor return his letter unread. It is so Mid-Victorian to destroy letters unread, and reveals stone-blindness to the possibility of theatre-tickets or a cheque being enclosed. Now resume we our waltz."

The subject dropped and they danced on in silence. The souls of both were too fully possessed of the glory of music and rhythm to profane it with conversation. Their feet moved unwearyingly and their bodies swayed to the harmony born of perfect mutual self-surrender. Daylight had long been struggling to shame and extinguish the yellow glare of the ballroom before Lady



Delaunay whispered that the last dance was now to be played. Myra felt her way back to reality like a child awakening from sleep.

"Half-past four and hardly a soul left! Oh, Cyril, I could go on all day. These people can have no more soul than Rodney says you have, if they want to go home already."

"Half-past four, and do you appreciate that we have had no supper, that I at any rate have sipped no sup and craved no crumb since partaking of an exiguous dinner tempered by good advice at nine o'clock last night? You have no more idea of hygiene than I have."

"Never mind hygiene, dear. Go and ask Murano to play the 'Rosenkavalier,' and then you shall have as much supper as the others have left. He won't play it—he never will alter his programme—but you can have the satisfaction of trying."

"If I ask Murano he will play it. I never ask for a thing unless I am certain to get it. That is what makes me so sweet-tempered. The secret of life—there is no secret of life, but it amuses us to think we have found it—the secret of life is to limit your desires to the easily attainable. What concerns me is the venue of supper. In the old days when domestic servants were readily corruptible and before Lady Delaunay had this house, it was possible to get supper for two laid in the library. You know the weak side of that celestial being whom your aunt pays to drink her port wine and trample on her. Persuade him



to continue the imperishable tradition of the library supper and I will guarantee that Murano does your bidding."

The nature of the blandishments lavished on the orchestra has not been revealed, any more than the persuasive eloquence applied by Myra to her aunt's butler, but the result in both cases was eminently satisfactory. Murano played the "Rosenkavalier" as only he could play it, repeating until the last feeble spirits had slunk exhausted away and Myra and Cyril remained in sole possession of the ballroom, and only ending when he perceived that his band was likely to stop playing from sheer prostration long before the last indefatigable couple showed signs of flagging.

Myra dropped luxuriantly into one of the colossal library armchairs.

"My friend—whether you have a soul or not, I leave Rodney to decide—but you certainly know how to dance. I make you my compliments. How did you induce Murano to change his programme?"

"I forget. I think it was principally my charm of manner. You who have gladly abandoned yourself to my company for nearly six hours on end can hardly wonder at his yielding to the fascination. But it is a great and good waltz. To the strains of the 'Rosenkavalier' I danced into your life yesterday evening, and to the same strains I dance out of it this morning. Whenever and wherever you hear it played it will remind you of my existence and of the happiest evening of my life."



"That sounds like an extract from a dying speech. It was perfectly phrased. But you still have a few years to live, though I wish you didn't look so white and tired; I have no doubt that we shall continue to drift into each other's lives. Now you must have some food. Sit still while I get you some supper."

Cyril smiled.

"I believe I have been intended by Nature for a chronic invalid. I love being waited on and I really am beat to the world. You don't notice it when you're dancing, Myra, but the moment you leave off you become conscious of age and infirmity. When I've finished supper, I should like to be spirited away on a magic carpet, slipped into a hot bath, dried and put to bed for twenty-four hours on end. Instead of which I shall light a cigar, walk home in the sunshine, purchase a *Morning Post* at the top of Middle Temple Lane, and then when I have bathed and conned the news of the day, I shall retire for an hour and a half, to brace myself for the interview with Rodney."

"If you habitually take only an hour and a half in bed, it's small wonder you get to look pale and thin. At that rate it is a question of months before you knock yourself to pieces. You ought to be forbidden ever to go out at night."

"I am, Myra dear, frequently."

"Ah, but I would see that my orders were obeyed. You'd be locked in."



"But it's no good going to bed if you can't sleep. That's my trouble. However, we won't discuss my ailments. Remember the handling my soul has had at the hands of Lord Darlington and the incomparable Rodney, and leave me the consolation of a few innocuous maladies. Now I want you to give me the roses out of your hair. I'm not growing sentimental, but I love William Allen Richardsons and they have served their turn with you. Of course I could say that the scent of a William Allen Richardson would always call up this night to my remembrance just as the sound of the 'Rosenkavalier' is going to do with you, but I don't suppose you'd believe me."

"Truly you might have said it, my friend, but it would have come under the heading of the obvious which you have sworn to avoid. My little roses have served their purpose, and like all things which have ceased to exercise a useful function"—she removed the spray from her hair and drew in its fragrance for a moment—"I throw them away."

The long library window was open to let in the morning sun, and the roses flashed for an instant in the bath of yellow light; then they struck the glass an inch from the opening and fell back on to the floor. Cyril ran to the window and picked them up.

"A little faded," he remarked. "But then we are none of us at our best after a long night's dancing. We will cut their stalks and put them in hot water and then wear them all day in our



buttonhole. They shall be our memorial and symbol—the memorial of the happiest night we have spent and a symbol of the fleeting beauty of life.” He removed the lilies of the valley from his buttonhole and carefully pinned the roses in their place. Then he looked up with a smile to meet Myra’s eyes.

“A short-lived memorial, Cyril. Your gallantry is deserting you.”

“The memorial, dear lady, typifies the length of time for which you will retain the events of this night in mind. By this evening the roses will be faded; by this evening you will have received Rodney’s letter. By this evening the diversion will have ceased to amuse and—to quote your own unmistakable words, ‘like all things which have ceased to exercise a useful function,’—you will throw it away.” He stopped with a laugh, and then continued more quietly: “I’ve got a more lasting memorial, Myra, the memory of your face and a chance sight of your soul which will come and blast my material faith with doubtings and indecisions.”

He paused to listen—someone had gone into the ballroom and was playing the opening bars of the waltz which had haunted their ears the evening through.

“That, Miss Woodbridge, is why I propose to dance out of your life to the strains of the ‘Rosenkavalier.’” He put his arm round her waist and drew her to him. Slowly they waltzed down the center of the library to the slow time of the



music overhead. At the door they stopped and faced each other. For the first time in his life Cyril was at a loss what to say; he was conscious of a feverish excitement which seemed to boil through his veins and fill his head with intoxicating fumes. Then he dropped on one knee, kissed her hand very gently, and passed silently out of the library.



## CHAPTER IV

### A GOOD RESOLUTION AND ITS FATE

"Lugete, O Veneres Cupidinesque."—CATULLUS.

**I**F you please, sir, there's a young lady wishing to see you."

"In that case, Beaumont, this is one of her lucky days. She will hear me playing the 'Rosenkavalier.' "

Cyril Fitzroy was sitting at the piano in his rooms at the Temple on the afternoon following Lady Delaunay's ball. He was attired in what he had found described in Harrod's catalogue as a "gent's brown smoking-suit," in honor of which and of the Imperial Tobacco Company in which he held shares, he was offering a burnt sacrifice of Lambert and Butler's Sundried Honey Dew. On the top of the piano in front of him stood a small cut-glass vase containing a spray of William Allen Richardson roses.

"Are you at home, sir?"

"Like a rat in a hole, Beaumont, that's the devil of it. Does she suggest a name or merely open up the limitless possibilities of anonymity?"

"She gave no name, sir, but I think it is Lady Violet Anstruther, and if you weren't at home she would like to write a note."



"Oh, show her in, Beaumont! You have taken a weight off my mind. Show her in, and then employ your deft fingers in cutting sandwiches of caviare and apricot jam. These latter are for her. I don't seek to palliate or defend the taste, Beaumont, but she appears to like apricot jam. Also, strive to divert her attention from a lingering smell of tobacco." Cyril spoke without removing the pipe from his mouth and continued to pay the "Rosenkavalier" with thoughtful effect.

"Lady Violet Anstruther."

"'The curtain rises and Cyril is discovered playing the piano.' It is a carefully thought-out pose. 'Surprised at the piano' would be better. But you don't make enough of the bass. Let me show you."

Cyril rose from the music-stool and Violet slipped into his place. She played the offending chords twice over—once for her own satisfaction and once to enforce the moral.

"Well, Cyril, I didn't come here to teach you music, but to give you presents. There's one—that's from father"—she handed him an oblong box—"and that's from me." She produced a note from her pocket and laid it on the box.

"What are they, Vi? I suspect the wooden horse. It is an elixir of good life from your father, a moral jumping powder, a spiritual tatcho, positively guaranteed to force the growth of a moral sense and make it sprout. Take it away. I am afraid. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*"



"It's the olive branch, Cyril. Father told me this morning that he had insulted you last night, and he's sent me round to make peace. They're cigars, warranted Corona Corona Claro without even a motto in the middle. Was he very rude?"

"My dear, your father is never rude. He merely tells me what he thinks of me. And it's all perfectly true. He says I have no serious purpose in life. Granted. That my influence on my fellows is detrimental. Granted. That I live solely for my own selfish amusement. Granted. And, finally, that I am laying up a fearful future for myself. There I'm not so certain, but on the other points he's as right as rain. Your father is a man of unusual perspicacity, Vi."

"You and he never seem to meet without a free fight. Father's got a high opinion of you, Cyril, that's why he's so rude. He says if only you would put your heart into *anything* there is no limit to what you might do."

"Well, you don't think so, Vi, do you? You see the fundamental shallowness of my character? Consequently you never put me on a pinnacle, never knock me off, never send me Corona Corona Claros—without a motto—to mend the broken bones. Hence the pipe which I hereby discontinue in honor of tea and caviare sandwiches."

"Father half believes what you say, Cyril. I never flatter you like that, and make no attempt to understand you. Are you going to make tea, or am I?"



"I am going to make it, Vi, because I probably make better tea than you do. Bachelors, and then only bachelors of some years' standing and an Oxford degree—preferably from the House—are the only people who know how to make tea. You being of the female persuasion, must regard it in the light of a lost art. But you shall pour it out. When I have made it I shall lie back in my chair and watch you. No man should ever pour out tea. His fingers are clumsy, he probably spills it in the saucers, and if it's a party for men only he is sure to do it with a pipe in his mouth. Now, you are going to stand with the sun shining on you with a background of Robert Louis Stevenson in blue and gold, oak panels to set off the hat, and a foreground of spotless damask, and I am going to watch you ministering and wish I were back again at—what is it, Vi? Fifteen? And that I could find someone to dress me in white serge."

"Employ your time better, Cyril, by reading my note while I pour out, and then let me have an answer as soon as I'm ready."

She threw him the letter and addressed herself to the teapot. Cyril opened it, glanced at the contents, and then gave himself up to watching her quick, graceful movements. He reflected that Violet Anstruther would never have passed for fifteen. She seemed to have bloomed suddenly from childhood into full flower within the twelve months that he had known her. Her mother had died when she was four and, in spite



of her tender years, she had been lately brought into contact with many of her father's official and political friends. The large dinner parties in Charles Street and the week-end and shooting parties at Anstruther Park had forced her into the position of hostess and given her a self-possession and independence unusual at her age. Cyril watched her beautiful golden hair flashing in the sun and sighed to think how soon this early forcing must rob her of her glorious youth, fading the hair and dimming the bright blue eyes and taking bloom from the delicately colored cheek. She was not yet sixteen, and Cyril with his adoration of the innocence and strength and purity of youth admitted with regret that it was well-nigh impossible to remember her true age or keep her back to it.

Treat a girl of fifteen as though she were twenty-five and by the time she is of age she will have forgotten what it was like to be a child. He felt the days were numbered before this bright fairy was robbed of her shining childhood and thrown irrevocably into the harem of lifeless and soulless automata who made up the married part of her social division. He thought of the young married women he met in society, compared them with Violet, and shuddered. He ran over the men who would in course of time be considered "eligible matches" for her, but the thought would not bear calm consideration. Cyril's craving for beauty was strangely limited, excluding the mature flower in favor of the bud and the deep



spiritual beauty of maternity in favor of superficial virgin freshness and purity. Beneath the self-possession which she had acquired, he was fully conscious of her real youth and helplessness, and an equal desire to shield her helplessness and preserve her youth was at the root of the almost fatherly affection which he lavished on her.

He was recalled from his dreaming by Violet's voice.

"Well, Cyril, what is the answer to be? Will you come? I think you had better have a quiet evening, you are looking too tired and thin."

"It's the strain of modern civilization, Vi; but I'm turning over a new leaf and going to no more dances."

"Are you getting old and stiff-jointed, Cyril? or did someone tread on your toes last night? I rather think you're getting left in the cold and running short of partners."

Cyril thought for a moment.

"I fancy my popularity is undiminished; the rush seems unabated, but at dances one is apt to meet disturbing people—I met one last night, hence my haggard appearance."

"Still, she gave you a spray of roses." Violet looked at him with a mischievous smile.

"She did not, my dear; I took them. But that is neither here nor there. I am getting too old to be disturbed."

"Not really old, Cyril dear, only a little crusted, like all people who live alone and only study their own comfort. But that's a forbidden sub-



ject, and I want an immediate answer to my invitation."

"Lady Violet Anstruther, you are deliberately trying to fluster me. To begin with, your letter contains two separate invitations, each of which must be dealt with on its own merits. Next, I shall want exhaustive particulars. If I dine in Charles Street to-night, who will be there, and what shall we have for dinner?"

"You will have me for sole company, Cyril. Father's got to go down to the House, and I invite you purely for the purpose of being amused. We shall dine *tête-à-tête*, and I shall probably play to you afterwards, not for your delectation nor yet for mine, but as the only means of keeping you from the piano. You like me to be candid, dear, don't you? More tea?"

"Undoubtedly more tea. The strain of evolving suitable repartee is racking: besides, you've not yet told me what you've ordered for dinner. An old don at Oriel always used to say that the worst of bachelor parties was that you missed the exquisite moment when the ladies left the room. I shall miss that to-night, and must be indemnified with permission—in writing—to smoke in the drawing-room."

"Granted, though I sha'nt bother to put it in writing."

"It is very irregular, but I suppose I must take your word in good faith. Next, as to dinner. I don't press for an itemized menu, but can you give me a general assurance that Matisse will



not expect me to eat meat or sweets, that he will provide suitable substitutes, and that the faultless Wilkins will not be offended if I refuse the choice vintage with which he will from time to time seek to corrupt me?"

Violet nodded.

"Article Two of the Preliminaries of Peace accepted and signed. We dine at 8.30. I say it without malice or personal application, but in my young days men were not so troublesome about invitations."

"There were more men and fewer invitations. The increasing disparity of numbers between the sexes has set that right, and mere man is beginning to have a value set on his presence instead of a price on his head. But in your young days, my dear—you are not old enough to remember the invitations issued for to-day's lunch. You only date back to the middle nineties. When you came into the world I was a lusty boy of seven. Bear that in mind, Vi, the next time you feel disrespectful."

"I take it all back, every word I have said in disparagement of your gray hairs. And now, be nice and say you will come down to Anstruther for the sixteenth of next month."

"Slowly, please, my dear. I must know who is to be there. What are the rules regulating (a) pre-breakfast smoking, (b) bedroom smoking, (c) facilities for sleeping with a door and window open. Also, I should like a list of the London trains for the moment when your father hurls me into outer darkness."



"Say you'll come and I'll tell you whom you'll meet."

"My dear, I never gamble."

"And this is the man who tells me thrice daily that he will go through fire and water for me." Violet rose with a majesty worthy of Lady Macbeth and crossed the room. She turned round at the door and smiled at Cyril. "You'd better come. You'll want some country air in a month's time."

"Stop, Vi; don't go! Stay here and talk to me and I'll promise anything. I'm sure I never said I would go through fire and water, but I believe I would, all the same. I'll come, and what is more I will try seriously, and for this one occasion only, to behave in a seemly and rational manner."

"Oh, not that, Cyril! You would be unrecognizable, robbed of half your interest and charm. Just say you'll come and that will be enough. Now I really must go or I shall never be ready to receive my distinguished guest to-night."

"But you've not told me who else is to be of the party next month. I'm full of questions to ask you. Oh, Vi, I never suspected such depths of perfidy!"

"I can't remember them all, but I'll show you the list to-night. Your uncle is coming, and the Harlands, Dick Wellstead, Mr. Stanford, Bertie Hanover and his sister, Lady Delaunay and her niece Miss Woodbridge—I expect you've met her—Effie Tremayne, and one or two others, about



sixteen in all. The official programme and map of the course will be issued after dinner to-night. Now good-bye, and mind you're not late."

"Good-bye, dear, and expect me on the stroke of 8.30. It is my sole despairing effort to achieve that impossibility—hot soup in a private house."

When she had gone Cyril filled a pipe and lit it abstractedly. His mind was running on the prospective party at Anstruther Park.

"'Lady Delaunay and her niece—Miss Woodbridge—I expect you've met her.' I expect I have, my dear Vi," he muttered, "and if it were anybody but you I had promised, I'd arrange to serve on a jury or act as best man or have an operation that week-end."



## CHAPTER V

### LADY VIOLET ANSTRUTHER AT HOME

*"Tecum ludere . . . possem  
Et tristis animi levare curas."*—CATULLUS.

**T**HE clock in the hall was striking half-past eight when Cyril Fitzroy divested himself of his coat and hat and followed one of Lord Darlington's footmen into the drawing room. Lady Violet left the open window where she had been watching for his arrival and came forward to welcome him.

"You are the soul of punctuality, Cyril," she remarked, taking both his hands in hers, "it will be recorded in your favor at the Day of Judgment. In the meantime virtue must be rewarded in this world or there would be no inducement to be virtuous." She walked to a small table by the fireplace and picked up a tray with three button-holes. Two were orchids, one white and one of many colors: the remaining flower was a pink carnation. "You may take your choice, Cyril," she said; "a white flower emblematic of the blameless life, one of diverse colors to suit a complex temperament, or a malmaison to typify the rosy blush of perennial youth."

"I want all three, Vi dear, to match three



aspects of the same arresting personality. Let me see, I wore white last night and they took advantage of my innocence. I will rule out white. What about the diverse colors? But I want to be simple and unaffected to-night: a piebald orchid would spoil the effect. That leaves only the pink. I cannot wear pink. When I am with you I feel old and sinful by contrast. If he only knew it, I should be wax in your father's reforming hands. Everything I have done in the seven years that divide me from you rises up to accuse me of old age. I cannot wear pink in your presence; it would demoralize me as much as dyed hair."

Lady Violet sighed.

"You know, dear, you're just a *little* troublesome at times. I spent quite a long time choosing those three for you, and now you're going to slight them."

"But you see my difficulty? All three are equally suitable or unsuitable, and I don't know which to choose."

"Let me choose for you." She looked at the tray for a moment, and then with a smile picked up the colored orchid and began to pin it into his coat. At the same time Cyril took the mal-maison, stripped off the silver paper, wire and leaves, and fixed it gently into her hair above the left ear.

"That's better," he remarked, "the blush of youth where youth still blushes, the parti-colors for the patchwork personality. That leaves us



only the blameless life to dispose of. What offers? Shall we keep it till the end of dinner and then send it down to Matisse if his cooking is up to standard?"

"No, I can't believe Matisse leads a blameless life. He is too fat, and fat people are never blameless. Keep it for father; he's coming in here from the House to say good-night before going to the Prime Minister's reception."

"Does he know I'm dining with you, Vi?" asked Cyril, as they walked down to the dining-room.

"Oh, yes, and was quite pleased to hear it." Lady Violet laughed and pressed his arm with her small hand. "Are you disappointed, Cyril? Did you think I was kicking over the traces and giving clandestine bachelor dinners in his absence?"

"Well, I hardly knew what to think, dear. His disapproval of me is so whole-hearted that I am hourly expecting to be forbidden the house."

"Instead of which—Has father told you that he's going to appoint you as my guardian if he has to go to India?"

"We discussed the subject last night at dinner. I tried to impress him with my peculiar fitness for the position; he dwelt with rather unnecessary emphasis on what he considered flaws in my character. Of course I am opposed to the idea of guardianship on principle. Guardians, like parents, are bound to exert an influence on their wards; bound to direct the development of their



characters into a certain channel, and practically bound to set up their own characters as a model for their wards to imitate. I regard an influence of that kind as unwholesome."

"Why unwholesome?"

"Because our personalities can only develop their fullest capacity by choosing their own environment. We are bound to be influenced, sometimes more and sometimes less, by everything that comes in contact with us; we all have a rich stream of chameleon blood flowing in our veins. Well, I maintain that it is immoral to thrust forward one type of influence and hold back another. It is immoral to recommend books to read, pictures to look at, places to see, people to meet, conduct to avoid: such recommendation is nothing but the advertisement of your own particular quack remedy. You must find out for yourself what food agrees with you and nourishes you, intellectually as well as materially."

"And if you happen on poisonous fruit?"

"You will die. But if the food and the books and the friends of your own choosing agree with you, you will develop a personality of your own. If you allow a guardian or a parent to be thrust upon you, you become merely a member of his spiritual family, instead of an individual masterpiece."

"And the moral of this, Cyril, is that you don't want to be my guardian?"

"I am afraid I was only thinking of myself, as usual. My homily was intended to point the



contrast between the individual, unfettered development of my own personality and the rival treatment served out by your father and the Samurai. He will only produce a uniform good type; I aim at diversity of type, not minding whether it is good or bad."

"Yes, you often tell me your diversion consists in collecting strange friends."

"And relatives. Some of my relatives are among the most precious specimens. Which reminds me that your father has poached on my preserves. Johnny Stanford is now a Samurai."

"Why was he included in your list?"

"Because he played the flute. I woke up one morning and reflected that I knew no one in real life who played the flute. Result—Johnny was ticketed and camphored before the day was out. All the same, your father doesn't know Johnny's real reason for joining the brotherhood."

"What was it?"

"It was the only certain way he could devise for coming here and having tea with you once a week."

"How absurd!"

"Not at all. It is a very good method of attaining salvation. I would almost become a Samurai, if that offered the only opportunity of seeing you."

"Well, dear, leave the Samurai and Johnny and me out of the question for a moment and let's get back to the guardianship. Would you take the responsibility?"



"Would you trust me, Violet?"

Lady Violet leaned her head on one side and regarded him with a smile.

"Would you make a good guardian? Would you let me do what I liked?"

"The answer to the first question is in the affirmative; to the second in the negative. I should make an admirable guardian, but you would have to obey me in everything. I should throw aside my most cherished principles and interfere with every detail of your life."

"Would that make much difference to your behavior?"

"What do you mean? Oh, that's rather unkind of you. It suggests that I am always interfering with you now."

"Not interfering. You give me good advice."

"Which you resent."

"Which I follow, dear. You tell me what dress I am to wear and whether I am to have flowers in my hair. Isn't this room an object lesson?" They were dining in a morning-room set apart for Lady Violet's exclusive use. "Oak paneling, chosen by Cyril; bookcases built to Cyril's order; books mostly given by Cyril; stained window, palpably ecclesiastical, obtained in a manner never disclosed, by Cyril; furniture collected throughout England by Cyril. Dinner ordered to meet Cyril's fastidious requirements; dress worn by me, ditto ditto. Flower in hair, placed there by Cyril. My dear, I don't think that's bad in the way of obedience. Oh, the fire-



place! I'd forgotten that. Club tender, *not* ordered by Cyril, but got by me because I thought he'd like it."

"Not a bad beginning!" Cyril looked into the big blue eyes and laughed. "I had no idea I had interfered with you so much, Vi. I wonder how long my ward would continue to obey me."

"Russian cigarette always taken by Cyril before the savory." She selected one from a box on the table and placed it between his lips. "Wooden matches because Cyril doesn't like wax. Are you afraid you couldn't trust me, dear?"

"Not at present. I wonder how long you would trust me and believe in my advice and obey me? I sha'n't let you come out for two years, and you won't like that. And I sha'n't let you go into grown-up society more than I can help. Mothers of thirty can't have daughters of twenty, and guardians of twenty-four can't have wards of more than about sixteen. I shall keep you at sixteen, just as you are now, for a long time yet."

"Come and find some cigars in the library." She rose from the table and took him by the hand. "Father doesn't expect to hear about the appointment for some weeks yet, so you need not begin your anxieties yet."

As they walked up the stairs Cyril said:

"Am I going to smoke to you in the library, Violet, or are you going to play to me in the drawing-room?"

"You are going to smoke to me in the library



and I am going to keep my promise by showing you the list of people invited to Anstruther next month."

"Ah, I was forgetting that. I want to see the list and I want to know why each one has been invited. So few hostesses can give satisfactory explanations on that head. Why, for instance, have I been invited?"

"Because I wanted you, dear."

"A perfect answer, which cuts short all further inquiry. Now for the rest of the list." He dropped into an armchair and addressed himself to the sheet of paper which Lady Violet had brought him from her writing-table, while she drew up a coffin-stool and seated herself on it in front of him. "House parties are always selected on the principle either of affinity or contrast, you bring people together because you want them to marry or to fight. I always work on the latter principle and try to include as much incongruity as possible, and you have the vulgar people throwing the refined people into relief, the dull acting as a foil to the brilliant, and the serious, useful souls, such as your father loves, forming a black background to set off the happy, useless butterflies such as people *you* invite because you want them."

"Has father done that in this case?"

"Yes and no. He has unquestionably achieved an effect of incongruity, but his motive, I fear, has, as usual, been one of moral elevation. I cannot avoid the feeling that we shall all serve



as object lessons to each other. First of all, you have full-blown Samurais like Welstead and Mortimer Forrest and the Harlands walking in an atmosphere of conscious rectitude and being pointed out for the benefit of detrimentals like myself as examples of what a man may become by abandoning himself to good works. That is Class One."

"But I don't call them the best type of Samurai."

"I call them dull dogs devoid of all sense of humor and blithely unconscious of all the good things which the world offers them. But it wouldn't do to tell your father that. Does not Dick Welstead sing comic songs in hop-picking encampments and introduce the cult of the tooth-brush into the joyless lives of the submerged tenth? Does not Mortimer Forrest give music lessons to the child Handels of Bermondsey and carry consolation to such of his young friends as have been led by excess of high spirits to spend a portion of their lives in Wormwood Scrubbs?"

"What has Lennox Harland done?"

"He has committed marriage and perpetrated offspring. I am its godfather and give it gold crosses, being sensible of the eternal picturesqueness of the religion they typify. Oh, Lennox is doing his share of the good work, and in one of its most important branches. Mortimer Forrest called on me two nights ago and consumed incalculable whiskey and cigars in the effort to prove that a rising birth-rate in Bermondsey and



a falling birth-rate in Temple Gardens were quickly robbing us of our leading place in the comity of nations."

"What is the next class?"

"Class Two comprises John Stanford in splendid isolation, dressed in purest white and kneeling devoutly at his *première communion*. His eyes stray upward to the stained glass effigies of Class One, the saintly company which he hopes some day to join. Behind him sounds the mocking, discordant laugh of Class Three trying to stifle with hollow jeers its chagrin at the sight of a soul saved."

"And who—besides yourself, of course—figures in Class Three?"

"Everard. It is something of a family preserve. And here your father's ingenuity is seen at its finest. Such time as Everard and I can spare from observing what we might have become if we had taken up our cross and followed the Samurai, we have to devote to looking at each other. I am to see in Everard the fate which middle-age has in store for those who seek their own happiness instead of trying to interfere with the happiness of others. Everard is to regard with tearful eye the effect of his pernicious example on his young kinsman. These are the three main divisions of the party; a few individuals at present unknown to me are still unclassified. Who is Sir John Wrexham?"

"He adorns Class One, and was one of father's earliest *protégés*. Father found him as a small



boy in Hoxton, serving in a chemist's shop and attending night classes in mathematics. Father discovered a genius for engineering, and Sir John is now partner in a shipbuilding firm on the Clyde, with a knighthood and the right to describe himself in after-dinner speeches as a self-made man."

"I know the type: presumption is its distinguishing characteristic. For millions of years God has struggled to make a man, and the result of that struggle you see at its best in me and at its worst in—say—Mortimer Forrest. Then Sir John Wrexham rushes in and solves the problem of the universe in his own person. We will now leave the Anstruther house-party, Violet."

"There are still one or two with a rag to their backs, Cyril. You should be more thorough."

"Time enough for them when we have inspected them at close quarters. Now, tell me if you liked the novel of Beaudessart's I sent you to read."

"I simply reveled in it."

"Then I will send you his latest, 'The Gods grown Weary.' "

"What is it about?"

"An exchange of souls. Man prays to the gods assiduously, day by day, and the gods ignore his prayers. But one day the gods grew weary of man's pitiful wailing and decided to grant every prayer as it was offered up. The first was spoken simultaneously by a man and woman rashly saying, 'I wish to Heaven we could change places.' The idea is rather cleverly worked out, and presents a full-bodied example of the maxim that we



should not grumble at the state of life to which it has pleased God to call us."

"That is a lesson you learned early in your dazzling career, Cyril."

"It is the only lesson in life worth learning, Vi. It is the whole secret of life; it is Herbert Spencer's definition of existence—'perfect adjustment to one's environment,' or some such melodious phrase. Haven't you learned it, Vi?"

"I'm not sure. It's an easy lesson to learn if your environment is a comfortable one. I'm not certain that I wouldn't change places with you, Cyril."

"That a daughter of the Earl of Darlington should say this thing! My dear, if you're going to change places, I agree you had better change places with me, but you're better off as you are."

"I wonder. It would be very tempting to try your way of life for a time. No cares, no anxieties, no hesitation about what to do: simply looking for amusement. Comfortable bachelor quarters in the Temple, one or two clubs. Never lonely or unhappy. My breakfast table snowed under with invitations, from which I pick and choose at leisure. A bevy of beauty waiting to dance with me every night which I can spare for such diversion, and waiting disconsolately if I elect to stay away."

"And, on the other side of the account, an impaired digestion, insomnia, and such embarrassments as Everard. There's a debit balance on Everard, Vi. And all this time I should be grow-



ing in beauty like a flower. Not quite sixteen, with hair like fine gold, eyes like forget-me-nots, and a skin whiter than the driven snow. Would you come and dine with me, Vi, if we changed places?" He got up from his chair in preparation for leaving. She laughed and caught hold of his hands.

"Would you have a buttonhole ready for me, Cyril, if I did?"

"Of course I should. That is agreed, then. I don't mind changing places so long as we can dine together alone like this. And now it's past ten, and whichever place you happen to be occupying at the moment, it's time for you to go to bed."

"Wait till father comes. He's on the stairs now, talking to someone. Are you going on anywhere, Cyril?"

"I don't know. I've promised to go to the Tressidy's."

"Well, go home instead, to please me."

"Vi, darling, to please you I would go to most places at most hours, but the Temple is not very bright at eleven o'clock."

"The darker the better. You are tired and ought to be in bed. An hour before midnight is worth two after."

"My dear, to accept rules of health for one's daily guidance argues that one is getting old and unable to keep up with the pace of tempestuous youth."

"To talk about youth as much as you do, dear,



is to confess you are losing it. When you are young and haelthy you don't know what youth and health are; you just accept and enjoy them. When either leaves you, you begin to talk about it and devise means of keeping it or winning it back. That's what you're doing now, Cyril dear, so go home early to bed."

As she finished speaking the door opened and Lord Darlington entered the room, accompanied by John Stanford. Lady Violet kissed her father and shook Johnny by the hand.

"We've come to spoil a *tête-à-tête*, Lady Violet," said the latter. "Your father is driving down to the Prime Minister's reception and has kindly promised to send me on in the car to the Tres-sidy's. I have come to keep Cyril up to the mark and make him come too."

"But Cyril has *almost* promised to go straight home and have a long beauty sleep."

"Any night but this, Lady Violet. In the unexpected rôle of Bishop Latimer deceased—he 'lit such a candle—by God's grace—as I trust shall never be put out,' and is at this moment forming the staple topic of conversation throughout the length and breadth of Mayfair."

"Cyril, what is this?"

"My dear, I know as little as you do. We must believe Johnny, because, like George Washington—also deceased—he cannot tell a lie without being promptly found out. He will doubtless explain in the car, but be the fire of good or ill import—I do not propose to add fuel to the flames,



and when the car has safely deposited its owner at the Prime Minister's, and I have ejected Johnny at Mrs. Tressidy's, it will bear me alone and disconsolate to the Temple and bed."

The three men left the house, and after Lord Darlington had been dropped at Downing Street, Cyril and John Stanford drove on together to Belgrave Square.

"Well, Johnny," began Cyril, "what is the candle that I so successfully lit last night and which is now guttering out for want of tending?"

"My dear boy, the conquest of Myra Woodbridge, the eclipse of Rodney Trelawney, the descent of the ice-cold gods from Olympus. Not bad for one evening's work."

"So good that another touch of the brush would spoil the picture, which is one reason why I am going to bed early."

"But, Cyril, Myra is going to be at Tressidy's; that's why it is so important you should be there."

"My dear Johnny, I have gone through twenty-three years without meeting Myra Woodbridge, and now I am going to see if I can go through another period of equal length without her. She dances beautifully, looks divine, and is most entertaining to talk to. We each extracted considerable amusement out of the other; her soul has been dissected and catalogued, and you have my fullest permission to fetch her down from the icy fastnesses of Olympus or to send her back to Rodney, which is her proper destination."

"When I spoke of the ice-cold gods descending from Olympus, I was referring to you, not Myra."



"I bow to the compliment. Olympus is good enough for me just at present. Have you ever met Lionel Fitzroy?"

"Husband to Evelyn Fitzroy?"

"And uncle to Cyril Fitzroy. He has other claims to distinction, but we need not discuss them at the moment. Lionel once said that every man who makes a proposal of marriage and has the misfortune to be accepted, walks out of the drawing-room or conservatory or down the steps to the front door, murmuring in tragic accents, 'What *have* I done, and why *did* I do it?' Here we are in Belgrave Square. Jump out, Johnny, and tell the man to drive me to the Temple. Then bring the fair Myra under the compelling fascination of your personality; but keep Lionel's words of ripe wisdom in mind before you do anything fatal yourself or urge me to do anything fatal for your amusement."



## CHAPTER VI

### A CELIBATE BY STATUTE

"The life of man solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."  
—HOBBS.

**I**'M ready for breakfast now, Melvin. Are there any letters?"

Rodney Trewlawney entered his sitting-room and flung his cap and gown into a window-seat overlooking the quadrangle. The last stragglers from chapel wandered up and down for a few moments, enjoying the morning sun before facing the more serious business of breakfast, and then perfect calm and desolation were restored. If a man is content to remain single there are few pleasanter places to live in than an Oxford college in summer, with its crumbling gray stone, its brilliant flower-boxes, its somnolent air of peace and perennial blend of youth and age. It amused Rodney to contrast the unchanging and flippant youthfulness of his colleagues with the premature age and world-weariness of the undergraduates. An Oxford don seldom grows old. Gray hairs and corpulence supervene, the narrow circle of interests grows narrower, the ever critical tone becomes slightly more acid and carping, but of age which softens criticism by



sympathy and broadens character by experience, he knows nothing. The monastic seclusion of college life secures that. Rodney had lived eight years in London between the time of taking his degree and accepting his present fellowship, and to the performance of his new duties he had brought a mind ripened by powers of observation which in his colleagues had never been developed. The appointment had been a welcome relief from his previous journalistic work. He was too highly strung and quickly tired to engage in competition with men less richly endowed but of tougher fibre than himself; at the Bar he would have been briefless and the routine of commercial life or a government office would have nauseated him in a week. Two nights before Cyril had jested about his search for the Ideal, and Rodney was still of an age and innocence to be flattered at receiving the character of a slightly loose-living and faithless woman-hunter. Had he understood Cyril's diagnosis of his character he might have been less pleased. His friends called him fastidious, and fastidiousness was his bane in life. He had been too fastidious to take off his gloves for the rough and tumble of life, and now at thirty-three was beginning to see that the prizes do not go to the spectator. Too fastidious for a competitive or monotonous profession, too fastidious to give up the search for an impossible ideal of womanhood or to see that no woman is without a blemish easily discoverable, he found himself drifting into the state of the



older fellows of the college—crabbed and inhuman, cold-hearted and small-minded, carping and jeering, lonely and yet self-satisfied. If one were prepared to accept such a conclusion open-eyed, or if one proceeded to it unconsciously as his colleagues had done by ceasing to be undergraduates only to become fellows, such a life might with all its limitations still be tolerable. But Rodney's experience of an external world made this impossible, the whole fastidiousness of his nature cried out against it, and he recognized that either he must leave Oxford or fortify himself by the importation of a corrective and antidote for the *rigor mortis* which had seized on the middle-aged children whom he met as a matter of form in Common Room. The moral which Lord Darlington had pointed for Cyril in the coffee-room of the Cynics' Club was as applicable word for word and letter for letter to his own case; he saw all round him examples of the shape he would assume in twenty years' time if he did not marry and break the spell. And then the old difficulty arose—and Rodney turned to the consideration of breakfast with the reflection that his search for the Ideal was at the moment compassed about with peculiar difficulties.

Three or four letters lay on his plate and he subjected the envelopes to a leisurely examination, finally selecting one where the writing was vaguely familiar. It was from Evelyn Fitzroy, an aunt of Cyril's and the depository of many strange confidences of his own.



"DEAR RODNEY" (it ran):

"I am motoring up to town to-morrow (Friday) from Gloucester and shall be passing through Oxford at about 12.30. If you are disengaged (and hospitable) you will present yourself at the Randolph at that hour and invite me to lunch with you in college. If you are engaged (or inhospitable) don't bother, and I will lunch at the hotel.

"Sincerely yours,

"EVELYN FITZROY."

Rodney propped the letter up against the milk jug and went on with his breakfast. At any other time he would gladly have welcomed Mrs. Fitzroy, but now he felt too dissatisfied with life in general to face with any pleasure the prospect of having to come out of his shell and do the honors of the college. The marmalade, however, brought decision of mind in its train, and he summoned his scout to the room with the words:

"Melvin, I shall want lunch for two at one o'clock."

"Yes, sir. A little chicken and potato chips and cauliflower, sir, and some meringues to follow?" For forty years Melvin—if left in an unguarded moment to his own devices—had ordered that lunch, and the appetite had grown upon him. He had refrained from offering salmon mayonnaise, but that was because the sex of the visitor was still obscure. He stood waiting to spring, if the lunch should prove to be ordered for a lady.



"No, Melvin, I think not." Rodney paused, regardless of the salmon mayonnaise hanging like the sword of Damocles over his head. "We will have dressed crab, some quails and green peas, a little maraschino jelly—oh, and some *croustade au parmesan*. Strawberries. I think that's all. I will make the coffee." Rodney spoke with regretful memory of previous coffee made by other hands and innocent of the seductive coffee berry.

"Very good, sir." Melvin sighed in the direction of a vanishing array of chicken, chips, and meringues. "Anything to drink, sir?"

"Yes, some iced hock cup;" and Rodney turned away to collect notes for two lectures and a private hour which he had to press into the interval separating luncheon from breakfast.

At 12.30 he walked into the hall of the Randolph Hotel suitably attired in a light gray flannel suit, black and white spotted bow-tie, and straw hat with a nondescript ribbon. He was obviously pleased with the general effect, and had vented his satisfaction in an unusually severe application of eau de cologne to his handkerchief.

"How do you do, Rodney? I'm so glad I found you on one of your less strenuous days. I would have written before to give you warning and opportunity for escape, but I only decided last night to come up to London."

"My dear Mrs. Fitzroy, all days are equally strenuous, but rigid economy of time and intense mental concentration still leave me an hour or two in each day to welcome my friends when they honor me with a visit."



"And also to run up to London now and again for dinner, and perhaps a dance?"

"Oh, hardly at all, Mrs. Fitzroy." Rodney smiled evasively. "I'm never seen in town nowadays. Shall we make our way round to my rooms?"

"Hardly at all, Rodney; quite so. But when you *do* come to London, I think you might call on me sometimes, or else make your visits less of a triumphal progress. I was about the only person who did not see you. My brother-in-law and Cyril appear to have monopolized you. I suppose you went up for Lady Delaunay's ball?"

"If you press for an answer, Mrs. Fitzroy, I did go up to town on Wednesday and it was for Lady Delaunay's ball. Also, I saw Mr. Everard Fitzroy and your graceless nephew. I would have called, but I only arrived in town in time to dress for dinner. Please forgive me and eat of my salt in token of reconciliation."

They had wandered in the direction of Rodney's rooms as they talked, and Evelyn Fitzroy stopped for a moment to look at the momentary animation of the sunlit quadrangle before climbing the stairs and accepting the chair which the passive Melvin offered her.

"You've got very pleasant quarters here, Rodney. I always feel I should like to seek the peaceful seclusion of an Oxford college and end my days there. At least that is the feeling which I experience every time I come here. Since convents practically ceased to exist, a college is the



only perfectly reposeful place I know of, though how long I should be able to endure it I cannot say."

"Not long, Mrs. Fitzroy. Nobody can live long in college without getting stifled—the life is too narrow and self-centered, and you simply shrivel up and die."

"Some of your colleagues take a long time in dying; I suppose they concentrate on the shriveling part."

"No, they all die after ten years. To shrivel or not to shrivel is a matter intimately connected with port wine and liver enlargement, but ten years sees the end of them."

"What happens then?"

"A transmigration of souls, I fancy. The souls of Oxford dons vacate the body and retire to a refuse heap. Then the pariah dogs come and sniff and turn away, and the lowest of the animal kingdom; and now and again—once in a hundred years—a soul is taken away and enters a new body."

He spoke with a bitterness so unusual and undisguised that Mrs. Fitzroy looked at him in surprise.

"Someone went into your bedroom last night and crumpled one of the rose leaves, Rodney. It's early days for your soul to be migrating. You've only been here a couple of years, haven't you?"

Rodney laughed.

"That's all, Mrs. Fitzroy, but I am afraid I



must be a bad subject. Mortification seems to have set in already."

"Lady Delaunay's ball has demoralized you, Rodney." Mrs. Fitzroy thought the symptoms were familiar and watched closely for his reply. "You fancy you are missing everything that's worth having in life because you aren't living in London in the season. You'd be bored very quickly with the life that people like Cyril lead. I fancy my graceless nephew, as you call him, would sell his soul for your present peaceful eighteenth century surroundings."

"Cyril has no soul, Mrs. Fitzroy, but we will let that pass. I don't think I'm demoralized by Lady Delaunay's ball; it has only emphasized the narrowness and isolation of this place. Man is a social animal, Mrs. Fitzroy, as Aristotle observed many years ago, and as I hand on with an air of profound originality to my pupils twice weekly. You must be more or less than a man, you must be a god or a brute-beast to live in solitude. That is the lesson from Lady Delaunay's ball and that's the reason for my present state of mind, for which I apologize to you unreservedly."

"How did people manage in the old days, Rodney? Did they mortify and grow corrupt, or is it a new development?"

"They would have mortified if they'd lived alone all their days, but the enormous majority didn't. They took orders as a condition of fellowship and only lived in a college until such time as they were presented with a fat living; and



then they married wives and became patterns of prolific domesticity."

"Were there no exceptions?"

"Oh, certainly, I admit that. The exceptions lived on in isolation just as I seem likely to do and realized Aristotle's maxim. They became brute-beasts and fancied they were gods."

Mrs. Fitzroy pondered for a moment. She had diagnosed the disease aright and now wanted to trace the cause. Then would be the time for playing Providence and finding a remedy.

"I wish Cyril were here, Rodney. Your words would carry him farther towards getting married than anything I could say."

"If Cyril were here I should not speak as I have done, Mrs. Fitzroy. You are sympathetic, also you knew beforehand what was the matter, as you always do, so I felt it was no good trying to conceal it. Sympathy is an unknown quality with Cyril."

"I should not say so. Perhaps you don't know him as well as I do, but I expect that some day he will get stirred up, and I look forward to a most interesting time in finding undiscovered qualities and emotions in him. But that is by the way. I want to hear about Lady Delaunay's ball."

"There's nothing much to tell, Mrs. Fitzroy, I was there exactly ten minutes."

"Ten minutes is just enough for instantaneous triumph or defeat."

"There was no battle."



Mrs. Fitzroy looked Rodney in the face to bring him back to the paths of truth. No man would come up from Oxford, least of all Rodney, for the sake of putting in a formal ten minutes' appearance at a ball. She shot an arrow into the air.

"Was Myra Woodbridge there? Of course she would be, the ball was in her honor!"

"Yes, she was there, but I didn't dance with her." Rodney spoke unguardedly and the next moment could have bitten his tongue off.

"I just wondered whether you would see her. She always interests me, and I rather fancy you met her at my house." Mrs. Fitzroy was too wise to risk the pitcher to the well again. "Now can you tell me the right time, Rodney? I ordered the car to be round at the gate at two o'clock, and I want to send a wire off before I go. Where is your nearest office?"

"The general post office in St. Aldates, but I'll take it, Mrs. Fitzroy, don't you bother. I'll walk round when you've gone, if you really must go so soon."

"You shall show me the way and I'll write it in the office. How do you know it's not something I don't want you to see?"

They rose from the table and walked out through the quadrangle into St. Aldates. Mrs. Fitzroy thought for a moment what form the message should take, and then picked up a pencil and wrote a telegram to Myra Woodbridge. "If disengaged, come and dine eight fifteen to-night Pont Street. Evelyn Fitzroy."



“And now, Rodney, for the car. It is so good of you to have given me lunch, and when term is over you must spare a few nights in London and let me put a more cheerful view of life before you. I regard you as a Daniel come to judgment. I’ve tried to find you a wife for six years and you’ve always been too critical. Now you pine for what you call prolific domesticity and I do not know how to help you. But I’ll try and find a solution by the time you come and see me. Good-bye, and keep up a brave heart.”

“Good-bye, Mrs. Fitzroy, and thank you for coming to see me. I shall be in town in three weeks’ time and will try to make amends for my present state of depression.”



## CHAPTER VII

### IN SEARCH OF CONSOLATION

"There's fish in the sea, no doubt of it,  
As good as ever came out of it."—GILBERT.

**A**S Rodney returned moodily to his rooms he heard his name called by a voice from his own sitting-room window. The owner of the voice was a younger contemporary of his own, a Scot by name George Fair, now leader writer on one of the great northern dailies.

"Hullo, Fair," said Rodney, "you're about the last man I expected to see in Oxford. What brings you away from proof-reading and 'pi' and other secrets of your dark calling?"

"I'm just in Oxford for an hour or two, seeing the people at the Clarendon Press about a book I'm producing for them. I nearly came and touched you for lunch, but it's just as well I didn't, as you appear to have been entertaining one or more important visitors. From the picturesque ruins of the meal, you appear to have departed in every particular from the orthodox luncheon menu. This originality shows enterprise, but it hurts my conservative sensibilities to see meringues—for example—treated with cold neglect."



"Your first term you eat meringues, your second term you watch unsuspecting guests eat them, your third and succeeding terms you bribe or bully your scout to keep the loathsome delicacies out of sight and hearing."

"Do meringues—in private life, of course—make much noise?"

"They do if they're too crisp and people crunch them, but it's a small point, anyway. Look here, are you coming down to me, or am I going up to you? I was thinking of a short walk, ending up with tea at the Snark's. I've not called on Mrs. Snark for generations."

"I'll come part of the way with you, but I've got to get down to the station by four, so it won't be for long. Just wait a minute." He disappeared from the window and rejoined Rodney at the foot of the stairs. "I've not seen the Snark since they made him a professor. How does he go down in his new college?"

"There was a short conflict of wills, ending in the Snark's complete triumph. He looked out for an opportunity of impressing on his new colleagues that a Fellow who comes to them from Great Thomas' College is of a finer clay than themselves. They had a tercentenary or something and the Master of the Ceremonies bustled round making the arrangements, and told the Snark that he was to be in his place at 3.15 to wait for the procession which was due at 3.45. The Snark focussed him with his right eye and then turned his face and focussed him with the



left, remarking, "If there—is any waiting—it will be—for me—not—by me." Result, complete collapse of the M.C."

"The Snark rather cultivates that style of speech. Do you remember the great Fifth of November when he was hauled out of bed by a panic-stricken porter to quell a riot in the Quad? The Snark found a horde of drunken revelers, so he focussed them with one eye after the other and remarked, 'Will those who can, put those who can't, to bed?' Then he retired to bed himself."

"The Snark is a great man."

"Without a doubt, and now that he is gone, I am hoping to see you stepping into his shoes. In the matter of personal appearance he has the advantage of you, but with an effort I see no reason why you should not match him in mannerism and eccentricity. That is a most necessary part of a young don's equipment, Trelawney, though not a high ideal in itself, I admit; but people expect a certain measure of peculiarity in dons, and you have got to satisfy that expectation."

They were walking along the High in the direction of Magdalen Bridge, and after a few minutes Fair, who was not of an athletic habit, suggested a tram. Rodney would have none of it.

"My dear Fair, I daren't trust myself in one. Were you with me the day Roger Shorncliffe collected hats? He drove down on a westward bound tram, and whenever he met one going the



other way he reached over and removed a hat from the head of an unsuspecting burgess, who hadn't time to recover from his surprise before the trams—even the Oxford trams—had lost themselves on their respective horizons. I've never been on one since, I feel too strong a temptation to go and do likewise."

Fair laughed.

"Roger was at his best in the Cowslip Road Alhambra. He used to be able to paralyze the performance without getting thrown out, which is no mean feat. Ordinarily I used to stroll into the front row of the stalls half-way through, and stop the action of the play by making the villain give me a résumé of the plot up to that point. I usually got flung out, but Roger was more subtle. He waited for the entrance of the heroine, and then rose from his seat, clutching his forehead, and gasping out, 'Curse her! how lovely she is!' Then he subsided, and it was taken as a tribute to the lady's personal charms. Another time, in a moving melodrama, he and I put our heads down on the back of the stalls in front and wept loudly and realistically, heaving our shoulders, while ladies in the pit grew sympathetic and said, 'Pore feller—how he do take it.' Then Roger spoiled everything by jumping into the orchestra, putting the big drum's head in chancery and beating it with his own drum-stick. There was a most awful row, and he and I both had to take sanctuary in the Conservative Club."

"It's most demoralizing, Fair, for you to rake



these things up out of the dim forgotten past. You must remember that I'm now the poacher turned gamekeeper, and one of my missions in life is to keep Roger's successors and imitators in check."

"Well, as I said before, I hope you're living up to the part and cultivating a few harmless eccentricities of manner. My complaint against the modern don is that he has allowed the great age of the eccentrics to pass away without putting anything in its place. Durham is gone and the Infant Bacchus, I understand, lives on soda and milk. It is up to you to revive the glorious tradition, Trelawney."

"We've still got El Hidalgo, and though the Snark's left us, he still lives and delights an admiring world with the sight of his side-whiskers."

"But you must do something yourself. Wear knickerbockers and a yachting cap, and carry the Pink 'Un visibly in your pocket like old Durham; scandalize your colleagues by drinking beer in cap and gown in various ill-famed public-houses like Mainwaring. Never appear without a tall hat and gold-knobbed cane like Pater. Do something, anything to collect a little innocent notoriety."

"It's gone out of fashion, Fair. Durham's death frightened a good many of his *bons camarades*. I remember dining with the Infant Bacchus in the days before his regeneration, and when he left the table to get cigars, some misguided mechanical genius attached the works of an alarm



clock to the electric switch and let off the alarm. Poor Infant Bacchus returned to be met with a series of blinding flashes followed by equally blinding darkness for the space of about three minutes. That night sealed his fate as a *bon viveur*."

"What of El Hidalgo?"

"Well, he dissipates his energies between Oxford and London, so we don't get the full advantage of his light-hearted personality. There was a bit of a row lately when he was editor of the *Athenian Herald*. He published a series of most questionable articles, and the committee unanimously resolved to eject him from the editorial chair at the next meeting. El Hidalgo got wind of it, and when the committee got to his rooms—they always meet on a Sunday morning—they found a notice pinned on his oak: 'Dr. Frobisher regrets he is unable to meet the committee of the *Athenian Herald*, as he is indisposed with gastric influenza. P.S.—Dr. Frobisher will be indisposed with the same distressing malady every Sunday this term.' That is his sole *jeu d'esprit* of recent date in Oxford. The rest of his talents he wraps in a napkin and only brings out for the edification of Indian students elsewhere."

"I firmly believe that one of them will put a knife in his back one day as he trips down Chancery Lane in gray flannel trousers and mustard-colored waistcoat and coat. 'Black Man, Black Mark,' is his simple but comprehensive motto, and he will tell you in confidence that his nose



is so sensitive that he can detect (and if necessary plough) a black man from the scent of his papers."

They had reached the foot of Headington Hill and Fair looked at his watch.

"I shall turn back here, Trelawney, and make my way slowly down to the station. It's been great luck catching you like this."

"My dear man, don't go yet. You've told me nothing about yourself or the work you're doing."

"Did you ever know two Oxford men get down to anything so remote and uninteresting as that in the first hour of their conversation? Emphatically no! They always do as we've been doing, dredge the waters of their memory and exchange more or less discreditable reminiscences which are perfectly familiar to them both. It's one of the most abiding charms of the place. Now I must go. When next I see you, I trust to find you following in the steps of the immortal Durham, and the Infant Bacchus and El Hidalgo. One parting prayer—don't get married. It's the ruin of Common Room and of the characters of those who comprise it. Good-bye."

Rodney turned and walked up the hill. He had been glad to see Fair and to barter hoary reminiscences with him, but was annoyed to see how every topic of conversation came back to one point. Fair's unfortunate concluding advice to him to cultivate a few harmless eccentricities and avoid matrimony had revived all the old pains and pointed in the most unmistakable



manner the contrast between the life he wished to lead and the life into which he was drifting by rapid if imperceptible stages—a lonely old age, made famous by a reputation for giving dinners at which he drank more than was good for him. At the moment that seemed to be all that Oxford had to offer him. He walked quickly up the hill and inspected his watch at the top. It was not yet 3.30 and he felt in his own interests he could hardly call upon the Snarks to give him tea for another half-hour. A seat was invitingly handy and he prepared to occupy the interval in smoking and contemplating the passers-by.

He had not been thus employed for more than five minutes when he perceived a car driven by a girl mounting the uphill. He wondered idly whether she would get to the top without having to change gear. Evidently she decided not, for as she came opposite him she bent forward and pulled the gear-lever. There was a grinding noise accompanied by a slowing motion of the car. "She's missed it," remarked Rodney to himself. Again the lever was pulled, but still without success. Then the car began to run backward down the hill, and by the time she had put the brakes on the engine had come to a standstill. She jumped out of the car with an air of vexation just as Rodney hurried up with offers of assistance.

"May I start the engine again for you?" he asked. "I always think it's a lot of strain for a lady."

She turned to him with a smile. "I'm very



much obliged to you. It's one of the old 1905 Rénaults and very hard to come back into second gear. Not that I want to excuse my own bad driving, but I've not been very long at it."

"Then I think you're rather courageous to go out alone. Are you qualified to do the usual roadside repairs?"

"Oh, yes, provided it's nothing very bad, and I never go very far from home, so that the resources of civilization in the shape of ropes and horses are easily available."

"I don't mind the driving, but I hate getting in a mess over the breakdowns. I never seem able to touch the internal organs of a car without getting smeared from head to foot with peculiarly adhesive black oil. However, I imagine I can start an engine and still keep my hands sufficiently clean for the demands of afternoon tea."

The girl climbed back into the car as Rodney addressed himself to the starting-handle. He pulled it over twice without effect; at the third attempt the handle flew from his hand and struck the top of his left knee-cap with very considerable force. He jumped back, clutching the injured member and hopping on one leg, while the girl in the car stood up to see what had happened and inquire whether he was hurt.

"It's only a back-fire," he remarked, gradually becoming more composed in his movements. "It might have broken my wrist, but it slipped out of my hand in time. It's all right now, thanks."



The girl was not satisfied, but Rodney insisted on returning to his task and this time the engine responded to his ministrations. He stood on one side to let the car pass and took off his hat in farewell, but instead of driving away, the girl slipped out of the car and came up to him.

"Look here," she said firmly, "it's no good pretending you're not hurt, because you can hardly stand. You must get into the car at once and I'll drive you home to have the knee seen to. I only live five minutes' drive from here."

"My dear lady, I assure you it's nothing. It was a mere tap. Just see, I can walk all right." He threw all his weight into the injured leg, which promptly disproved his words by refusing to support him, so that he had to clutch at the mudguard to prevent himself falling.

"Just as I said. Now hop on your sound leg and lean on my shoulder. Then we'll have a look at the damage and bathe it, and then when you've had some tea I'll motor you into Oxford."

The pain in the knee made walking so completely impossible that Rodney followed her instructions with lamb-like obedience. She drove him a couple of miles to a small bungalow standing back from the road and surrounded on two sides with a wide expanse of lawn. Again leaning on her shoulder he hopped to a deck-chair into which he subsided, and as soon as she had supplied him with cushions and a second chair for the leg, she disappeared indoors in search of tea and the paraphernalia of domestic surgery,



As she walked away Rodney turned to admire her light, graceful carriage. She looked about two-and-twenty, with a slight figure of medium height. The hair and eyes were black, in marked contrast to the whiteness of her skin, which presented no color relief save in a blue vein in either temple. Later on as she bathed and bandaged his knee, he saw that the delicate blue veins were reproduced in her hands, thin white hands which moved very quickly and touched his knee so gently that he was hardly conscious of her fingers. Unconsciously he compared her with Myra Woodbridge, but beyond the fact that both parted their hair at the side and brushed it away in a long low sweep over the ear, there was no single point in common. He was interested to notice an engagement ring on the third finger of her left hand, and then, for no accountable reason, intensely irritated at the sight. Finally realizing the folly of his annoyance, he indulged in the equal folly of wondering who the man was.

"Now I've finished," said the girl, jumping up from her knees and drying her hands on a towel. "I've told my maid to bring tea out here and it ought to be ready now. By the way, it will simplify things if we introduce ourselves. My name is Enid Sutherland."

"Mine is Rodney Trelawney and I'm deeply grateful to you, Miss Sutherland, for doctoring me like this. I will just apologize once for all the trouble I've caused and am still causing and then we'll drop the subject. Just as if we were playing



tennis," he added, "one season-ticket apology made at the beginning of the set, to remain valid till close of play."

At this moment a maid with a crowded tea-tray appeared and made preparations for the meal on a table which she had drawn up to Rodney's side.

Enid Sutherland poured out a cup of tea and placed it within Rodney's reach.

"Milk and sugar, Mr. Trelawney?"

"No sugar, thanks. What a charming place you've got here, Miss Sutherland! I always regard Oxford as fairly reposeful, but this is a veritable land of lotus-eaters. I wonder you ever leave it."

"Well, I have to get down to the Bodleian a certain amount for some work I'm doing there, but otherwise I spend most of my time up here. I think it's healthier than in the town. Do you live in Oxford?"

"Yes, I'm at Great Thomas' College."

"Not an undergraduate, are you? Excuse my asking."

"No, I'm a don there."

"I thought you looked too old for an undergraduate, but at the same time too young to hold a studentship. Have you been there long?"

"Only two years. I was in London for several years after taking my degree, and then I got this opportunity of coming back to Oxford and I jumped at it."

"I don't wonder. Your college is a charming



place, though I hardly ever set foot there. I remember going to the Commem. ball there five years ago; it was when I was coming out, and I marked that night with a red cross in my diary, or should have done so if I'd kept one."

"I missed that one, somehow, but I went two years ago, wasn't it? Weren't you there by any chance?"

"No, I gave up going out to dances when I married."

Rodney gave a start of surprise.

"Are you married? I beg your pardon, I had no business to ask such a question, but I noticed you wearing an engagement ring. I suppose I ought to call you Mrs. Sutherland?"

She laughed a little bitterly.

"No; I suppose the engagement ring is misleading, but I'm not Mrs. Sutherland. I am really not sure what name I'm entitled to give myself. You may as well know the worst, as I find many people are rather annoyed if they talk to me first and discover what I am afterwards. Do you read the proceedings of the divorce court?"

"Never," said Rodney, with unnecessary emphasis. Then he saw his blunder and added, "I am so sorry. I ought not to have said it like that."

"No apology is needed, Mr. Trelawney, but if you don't read divorce cases you won't have heard of the Lanchester divorce—my first and only essay in publicity?"

"The Lanchester case? Was that you?" He



thought for a moment. "No, I didn't read it, but I heard something about it from a friend of mine who's a solicitor. You divorced your husband?" She nodded. "And then refused to accept alimony?"

"That is so. That's why I am working up here. I married at nineteen, and the divorce took place two years ago, when I was twenty-one. You will excuse my trailing this family history before you, but so many good charitable souls refuse to associate with a woman in my position without in the least studying who it was who filed the petition, that I wanted to put you on your guard."

Rodney leaned forward and spoke very seriously.

"Miss Sutherland, I am privileged to have been taken into your confidence, and if I may do so without offence, I should like to offer you my very sincere sympathy."

"Thank you, Mr. Trelawney. I suppose I ought to be grateful, but I try so hard to keep from pitying myself that I always discourage sympathy in others. Don't think me ungracious, but it is apt to remind me of what I want forgotten. I only like to look forward. I'm twenty-three, in perfect health, with plenty of work to keep my mind occupied, and I make enough money to keep the wolf from the door. Above all, I'm perfectly independent; and, taken together, these things are helping me to forget those two awful years."

Rodney pondered what she had been saying and then asked:



"Do you never feel lonely, Miss Sutherland, living up here all by yourself?"

"We cannot have it every way, Mr. Trelawney. I can't have the joys of perfect independence and the pleasures without the responsibilities of society. You are a bachelor—excuse me, I can see that—do you never feel you would be happier with a wife? You live in college and dine with your colleagues and meet them in Common-room—do you never feel that the world is too much with you? As a matter of fact, I *do* sometimes long to have someone to talk to, that is why I brought you here to tea instead of driving you into Oxford, which would have been if anything rather quicker. You see, I am quite frank with you."

"You are, and I thank you for it."

"I will tell you something more. When you mentioned the Commemoration balls you made me feel—homesick's not the right word—but I daresay you understand what I mean. I used to love dancing, and I suppose at twenty-three even in a life like mine it's a little early to have the flesh properly mortified."

"At twenty-three—yes. Do you contemplate ever marrying again? I know it's an impertinent question, but I've asked so many without being sent about my business that I'm growing bold. It's not mere vulgar curiosity, but I'm really interested."

Miss Sutherland laughed.

"Oh, if you ask questions I don't like, I simply



sha'nt answer them, but I don't put this one in the tabooed area. I really don't know. Needless to say, I sha'nt marry again at the age of nineteen, and I hope if I do remarry I shall have profited by my experience, but beyond that I keep an open mind. The married state doesn't hold out any particular attractions for me at the moment, but, on the other hand, I have no insuperable objection to it. It's simply a question of times and seasons and men and means. Is the leg any more comfortable now? We've been talking so hard that I forgot I was in charge of an invalid."

"It feels a bit hot, but it doesn't hurt much now, thanks. How is the time getting on?"

"It's after five, about ten past. I think I'll put another bandage on and then motor you into Oxford. You will have to get a doctor to come and inspect the damage, but he had better come to your rooms, that will reduce your walking by one stage. I suppose the porter at your lodge will be able to give you a hand up?"

"Oh, without a doubt." He rolled up the leg of his trousers in readiness and watched her quick fingers unwinding the bandage. "What do you make of it, Miss Sutherland?" he asked.

"There's a most awful swelling. I don't know, but I should think there's water there. You'll have to lie up for some time and rest it."

Rodney suddenly developed a boldness which surprised him.

"Will you come and see me, Miss Sutherland?"



I'm a very bad patient and want people to come and sympathize with me. Do say you will!"

She turned her large black eyes up to him and then broke into a laugh.

"Why shouldn't I? I'm afraid it would scandalize the college, but if you feel your reputation is beyond fear and reproach—I can say the same of mine."

"I'll make assurance doubly sure by getting my mother to come up and maintain the proprieties. Then no one can object. When will you come?"

"When would you like me to come?"

"To-morrow?"

"Isn't that a little early?"

"Well, you see, the knee may not be as bad as we think. I may be about again in a day or two, and then my excuse would be gone and all the interest attaching to me as an invalid would have evaporated. Make it to-morrow, at lunch time, and my mother will be there."

She laughed again at his importunity.

"All right then, we'll say to-morrow at lunch time. It's the least I could do, seeing that you broke your knee in the service of my car. Now, are you ready to be moved?"

"Not for one moment, please, Miss Sutherland. You say you pine for a Commem. ball: will you come to the Great Thomas ball with me? It's fixed for the 21st, and ought to be a big success. I wasn't thinking of going, but if I'm all right by then and you will come with me—then I shall



be able to go with the certainty of enjoying myself."

"When you don't even know if I can dance! No, we must be content with one thing at a time, Mr. Trelawney. I'll lunch with you to-morrow and hear what the doctor says of your knee, and then we shall be in a position to discuss the ball."

The subject dropped, as her energies were now required for helping him into the car and driving him down into Oxford. She left him at the gate to the undisguised interest of the porter and a large number of undergraduates who were gathered there, and with the assistance of a stick and an arm he hobbled across to his rooms.

It was late that night before he went to sleep. Not that the knee was paining him; the doctor had dressed it and made it comfortable, but he was thinking of a slight-figured girl with black hair and eyes and an unusually white skin. He fell to an analysis of his own feelings and noted that the predominant feeling was one of pity for the young life that had already been so cruelly mauled. Pity was a new sensation to him. He had always looked for something to admire, something to gratify his love for perfection in form, and though the girl's face with its quiet melancholy beauty haunted his memory, he felt that admiration of her was subservient to a quite unselfish pity. The feeling was so unusual that he gave it full play, and did not notice that for the time being it completely eliminated from his mind that other feeling which hitherto he had cherished for the memory of Myra Woodbridge.



## CHAPTER VIII

### PROVIDENCE GETS TO WORK

“Could thou and I conspire  
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,  
Would we not shatter it to bits? and then  
Remould it nearer to our Heart’s Desire.”

—OMAR KHAYYAM.

MRS. FITZROY continued to think of Rodney and his troubles as the car ran on through the blazing June sunshine to London. She was genuinely fond of him and had long felt that he would lose much of his nervous instability and preoccupation if he had a wife to look after and to look after him. She was aware of the difficulties of finding a girl to suit Rodney’s exacting taste, but Myra Woodbridge in looks and intellect and personal charm stood in a category of her own and challenged a new canon of criticism. They had met at dinner in her house in Pont Street three months before, and Evelyn Fitzroy had been gratified beyond her most sanguine expectations by the success of the meeting. Rodney had capitulated at once, as she knew he would in the presence of Myra’s unusual beauty. It was the favorable impression that Rodney made on Myra which



surprised her so agreeably. He was physically attractive to any girl, with his thin, tall figure, clear-cut intellectual face, and ready smile. He had had a brilliant career at school and at Oxford and could talk on all subjects, and talk well on some. But what endeared him most to his friends was his childlike simplicity and unworldliness, the doubtful privilege of an only son, and a source of amusement to men and of interest to women. No one could meet Rodney without liking him, but Evelyn Fitzroy knew well that any girl who was aware of Rodney's fastidiousness and butterfly preferences would regard marriage with him as a peculiarly speculative investment. That was why she had been doubtful of the reception he would obtain from Myra Woodbridge, who was the last person in the world to be content with a partial or ephemeral homage. But the arrival of Myra seemed to mark the end of Rodney's butterfly days. He regarded her as the embodiment of all the virtues which he had been seeking so many years and only finding here and there in isolated and otherwise unsatisfactory instances. His adoration of her had been whole-hearted, and few women are proof against devotion so manifestly sincere and single-minded. Evelyn Fitzroy would have been more than human if she had not rubbed her hands over the success of her nicely-laid schemes. All women and most men are matchmakers by primitive, irresistible instinct—the instinct of power—carrying as its reward the gratification of bending two unwilling



destinies to do one's bidding. And in all women who are as happy as Mrs. Fitzroy had been in her married life, the instinct becomes a slavish passion to which every other pastime in life becomes subjected.

As Myra Woodbridge entered the drawing-room in Pont Street, Evelyn Fitzroy was thinking of the temporary check she had sustained and wondering what was the best means of repairing the damage done. She knew that Myra was far too subtle to be drawn into making any confidence against her will. It would be useless to give her rope, as Rodney had been given rope, in the certain and comfortable expectation that she would lose no time in hanging herself. The best way would probably be to ask her frankly the why and the wherefore of her latest freak. She had too much sense of humor to evade a candid question, however little right the questioner might have to put it. Further, she was too combative and too anxious to justify her own conduct ever to decline a challenge if the old-fashioned and obvious-minded saw fit to place her on her defence.

Mrs. Fitzroy raised her tall, graceful body from the chair in which she was sitting and went forward to meet her guest. She was one of those women who seem to attain their maturest development of body and mind at the age of forty and to live thereafter in the long full-bloom of summer. Her tall, well-formed figure, black hair and handsome features had won the admiration of many



young men besides Rodney Trelawney, who came to consult her in any crisis which demanded wisdom and sympathy and kindliness. Cyril Fitzroy pointed proudly to his aunt as the only one of his female relations of whose sanity he was perfectly convinced, and almost the only one of either sex who was perfectly dependable in an emergency. As a reward, if she had chosen to exact it, she had the gratification of knowing that Cyril would inconvenience himself for her in a way he would never dream of doing for anyone else. Evelyn Fitzroy was fully conscious of the influence she exerted among men, but by no means so certain in dealing with women, particularly with a girl so independent and wayward as Myra.

"Well, Myra, this is very good of you to come at a moment's notice and take pity on my loneliness. My husband is in the country, the boys are still at school, and I should have spent the evening in solitary confinement but for you."

"Evelyn dear, I would come from the ends of the earth to see you. I had no idea you were going to be back in town again this season or I would have asked you to dine with Aunt Alice and go on with us to the Huntly's to-night."

"Are you going there, Myra? Don't say you've thrown her over to dine *tête-à-tête* with me?"

"I don't know really. If I feel strong and wakeful in two hours' time I may requisition you to take me on there. Otherwise, quiet conversation and early to bed."



"Dinner is served, madam." Mrs. Fitzroy's Dome of Silence, as she called him, had noiselessly come upon the scene apparently without the formality of opening the door.

"You shall take me down, Myra dear, and if you want me later on I will come with you, though I've got a lot to say to you after dinner, and you will need all your strength for the ordeal."

The dinner passed quietly to the harmonious accompaniment of Mrs. Fitzroy's musical voice and Myra's silvery laugh. It was not until they had gone back to the drawing-room and coffee had been served that Myra broached the subject which had occupied her friend's thoughts.

"Well, Evelyn, what have I done? Something that you disapprove? That I judge by your preoccupied air and the urgency of the telegram. Something to do with Oxford—because the wire was handed in there. What link have I with Oxford? Obviously you lunched with Rodney to-day. That is what we call feminine intuition." Myra smiled to see the accuracy of her guesses and waited for Evelyn's confirmation.

"My dear, conversation with you is an intellectual stimulus. You brush aside all preliminaries and vain repetitions and lay your hand on the heart of the subject. Yes, I lunched with Rodney, and I want you to tell me what you have been doing to him?"

"Doing to Rodney? Nothing. I have hardly seen him for weeks."

"That in itself is significant."



"Of what? Have I to apportion my time so that I give eight hours to sleep, three to meals, two to Rodney and so forth? As you know, he has been in Oxford since the end of April."

"Not without a break."

"No, he was in town this week. I had tea with him and he came on to Aunt Alice's ball."

"Well?"

"Well? My dear Evelyn, we are at a deadlock. Tell me what you want me to say and I will say it."

"I want to know what happened at the ball."

"At the ball? Oh, Rodney promised to meet me at eleven and then never turned up till about one. In the meantime I had made other arrangements for the evening and he seemed rather upset because I would not dance with him. Do you blame me, Evelyn?"

"No, dear, I don't. But I want you to think very seriously over what I am going to say to you. I was motoring through Oxford to-day and went to lunch with Rodney. He seemed fearfully despondent about something, and though he would not tell me what was the matter, I chose to fancy (never mind why!) that you were in some way connected with his condition of gloom. Now, Myra, you and Rodney have seen a great deal of each other during the last few months, and you must know each other fairly by now. Rodney's opinion of you I know; he burns incense to an accompaniment of Nunc Dimittis and thanks his God that he has been



cast into the same generation that gave you birth. What your opinion of Rodney is I have no idea. If he is merely the male variety of the human species and nothing more—well, so much the worse for him, and the sooner he outgrows his infatuation the better for his peace of mind. If he is anything more to you, Myra, I think it is time for you to thaw a little.”

“In plain language, Evelyn?”

“In plain language, my dear, Rodney is in love with you and wants you to marry him, and he only wants a spark of encouragement to bring him up to the mark.”

Myra walked to the fireplace and rested one elbow on the mantelpiece, leaning her head on her hand.

“You are almost right, Evelyn, but not quite. Rodney asked me to marry him on the afternoon before Aunt Alice’s ball and I told him to wait till eleven o’clock for my answer. He wrote to me the morning after the ball—pages and pages of apology and importunity—begging me to give him a favorable reply.”

“And what have you done?”

“I told him I was not sufficiently certain of my feelings in the matter at the present time to give him an affirmative answer.”

A long silence followed. Though Myra had spoken quite dispassionately, it was clear to the older woman that there had been struggle, pain, and uncertainty before the decision had been made. Mrs. Fitzroy was doing battle with her



disappointment. She was so convinced of the perfect suitability of the match that it had come as a blow to find she was faced with a *cause jugée*. She did not know how to fathom the reason which had prompted Myra to her decision; it might be a whim, or it might be the result of careful, painful deliberation—with Myra one could never tell. The one thing which stood out very clearly in Mrs. Fitzroy's eyes was that the reason—however sound for Myra—was insufficient for herself. Myra's judgment of Rodney and of his suitability as a husband had come into conflict with her own, and the only satisfactory solution was for Myra to go to the wall. Being human, Mrs. Fitzroy had become a matchmaker; becoming a matchmaker she had dehumanized herself.

The silence was broken by Myra moving a footstool to the front of Mrs. Fitzroy's chair and seating herself upon it in an attitude of humility.

"Well, Evelyn," she said, "I want you to say what you think of my action."

"No, dear, you want me to say I approve of it, which is a very different thing. This is a matter about which I can express no opinion. I am too much biased in Rodney's favor to view him with judicial eyes. If you think you can secure his happiness and your own by marrying him, you will do so without being influenced by me, and similarly if you feel faced by—what is it called?—incompatibility of temperament, you will not be argued out of your opinions by me.



I only offer this suggestion to you—have you thought sufficiently of Rodney's request and are you sure that you are ever likely to meet with the same whole-hearted adoration as he will give you?"

"Evelyn, will you please try to believe me when I say that whole-hearted adoration is about the one thing in the world I could not stand. I am speaking seriously now. There is a strange doctrine which people used to accept but which I absolutely reject, that the privilege of selecting a mate was vested in the male and that woman's liberty of action began and ended when she said 'yes' or 'no' to a proposal of marriage. In early society wives used to be won in battle, or stolen as the Romans stole their Sabine brides. Then they were bought from dealers in the open market; then their parents parted with them for a consideration. We are still passing through successive stages of evolution, and nowadays we plume ourselves on the perfect absence of restriction in marriage. In a sense it's true: women are not forced to marry if they refuse point-blank to enter the church, but it's an illusory sort of freedom. They can't go out and seek their husbands as the men can go out and seek their wives." Myra paused. "You did not know I was a believer in woman's rights and the equality of the sexes, did you, Evelyn?"

"My dear, I cannot imagine where you have been learning such—well, wrong-headed ideas. You are as free to choose a husband as Tom,



Dick and Harry are free to choose wives. There is a question and answer in every marriage. Man is free to put the question, but woman is equally free to answer it how she pleases. You have just shown that yourself."

"But that is not the liberty I want. I am not content with it. A man is free to overcome a woman's resistance and force her to love him. A woman has adoration offered her with the alternative, take it or leave it. That is my only complaint against Rodney."

"I do not understand you, Myra."

"I am afraid you never will, Evelyn, on this subject—but I will try to make my meaning clear. My father objected to anything being given to anybody without payment. He used to say that price and value were indissolubly connected in the English mind. Give a thing for nothing and it will be valued at nothing. Give poor people free education and they regard it as valueless. Similarly in this case. If Rodney gives me the whole-hearted adoration you speak of—and I don't have to struggle for it—I shall count it as valueless, and in course of time it will die of neglect. Which is not a good condition for 'sickness and health, weal and woe' for life. I know the idea is not usual, but I firmly believe in it."

"But, my dear, granted for the sake of argument that all you say is true—granted that woman has only a passive part to play in the preliminaries of marriage—granted that it is all very wrong and dreadful—how do you propose to remedy it?"



Myra thought for a moment before replying, and then raised her large dark eyes to Mrs. Fitzroy.

"The remedy is to find someone who attracts me and force him to love me whether he wants to or not. And when I have won his love I shall value it, and when he has had to part with it with a struggle he will see the value I put upon it and know it is in good hands, and he will honor me for the fight I have fought and the victory I have won."

"And the reluctant, passive victim—have you found him yet?"

"I am not sure, Evelyn, I really do not know."

Mrs. Fitzroy suppressed a tendency to yawn.

"Time deals hardly with me, Myra. I am just about double your age and I am trying to remember whether I shared your feelings when I was twenty. I don't think I can have or I should remember it. Besides, I never had sufficient admiration to turn my head and make me *blasée*. I wonder if your life will be more amusing than mine. I can find it in my heart to envy you your pursuit of the unattainable."

"I lodge an objection against '*blasée*' and 'unattainable.' 'Amusing' is allowed to stand. I only show you the influence of modern ideas on the formation of character."

"My dear Myra, modern ideas on life and morals are like modern ideas on medicine. One or two quack remedies are harmful; the rest are the old family prescriptions which our grandmothers



used, poultices and mustard plasters and so forth, served up in a new and far more expensive form. There is nothing much of the modern spirit about you, Myra."

"So your nephew, Cyril, tells me. He says I am primitive, the incarnation of woman's blind husband-getting instinct run riot and preying on the male portion of society. Which reminds me of a grievance I have against you. Why did you never let me meet Cyril at this house? However, we'll deal with that later. He divides the stages of man's evolution into three. First comes man the body-hunter, the ancient Roman who stole his bride; then man the heart-hunter, the philanderer—what we used to call the flirt before that word was relegated to the provinces—I fancy Rodney was dragged in as an example of the second class. Finally comes the latest development, the soul-hunter, and this is the class to which Cyril claims to belong. He tells me he is a collector of unusual souls and a connoisseur of rare emotions. The pursuit as he conducts it is a sexless one: the body which was the governing influence in the first stage and the heart in the second, have been left behind. It is a purely intellectual research. He amuses me this nephew of yours."

"Where did you meet him?"

"At Aunt Alice's ball."

"Before or after Rodney's appearance?"

"Oh, before, hours before. Now let me help you out with your inference. I danced with him



from 11.30 till about 4.30 without a break. Then we had supper alone in the library. So much for the facts. You are now going to infer that I have found in him the reluctant passive victim, and that both he and Rodney are being sacrificed to make a Roman holiday? Is it not so?"

"My dear, I can only repeat that conversation with you is an intellectual stimulus. How is he taking the treatment?"

Myra began to look mischievous.

"I hardly know yet, but he dropped on one knee and kissed my hand on leaving."

"Don't tell me that Cyril is becoming softly sentimental. It would shatter the last of my few remaining illusions."

"No, I don't think it was sentimental; it was slightly theatrical and seemed a carefully thought-out pose."

"That is more like my cherished nephew. And now, Myra—if you want me to take you to the Huntly's—we ought to be making a start."



## CHAPTER IX

### AT ANSTRUTHER PARK

*"Raro antecedentem scelestum  
Deseruit pede poena claudo."*—HORACE.

LORD DARLINGTON'S house-party arrived at Anstruther Park in April weather. Brilliant sunshine had been punctuated by rainstorms the day through, and at five o'clock in the afternoon it was felt to be prudent to take tea within doors rather than risk another downpour on the lawn. The guests distributed themselves about the long hall while Lady Violet ministered to their wants from a small table in the center. Cyril made himself useful for a strictly limited period in handing round cups of tea, and then withdrew to a remote window-seat where he observed his uncle and John Stanford already established.

"Well, my young friends," he remarked, "have you introduced yourselves? Everard, this is John Stanford, 'faithful and just to me, Tho' Brutus saith he was ambitious.' In what way ambitious I know not. He plays the flute, but that is one of the things we have in mind when we pray to be cleansed of our secret faults. Johnny, let me introduce my uncle Everard, a



gay eupeptic son of Belial. Not to know Everard Fitzroy confesses an imperfect education. Well, Everard, what's the news?"

"Nothing, my dear boy, nothing. I see you are still invited out in respectable society."

"Ah, it won't last much longer. Darlington has me here to rob me of my glorious manhood and turn me to a useful purpose in life. If he fails I shall be flung from the doors; and if he succeeds, why, there will be no need to inflict my presence on the household. My tenure is of the most precarious."

"Why does he single you out for these marked and embarrassing attentions?"

"Oh, I'm not singled out. Anybody is liable. It's just a bad habit, picked up in youth and never shaken off. He can't bear to see anyone idle, and always wants to cripple a man's artificial development by taking him out of himself and making him work." Cyril rose from the window-seat and retired to have his cup replenished. "Darlington never appreciates the unique social position occupied by people like myself. If I were poorer I should have to work for my living. If I were richer I should have a position to keep up, landed estates and so forth. Probably I should be hounded into Parliament or diplomacy. If I were discontented or ambitious or wanted to marry or wished in any way to change my lot, gone would be my peace and happiness. I should become like Darlington or Hugo or Johnny here, instead of remaining"—he looked up at his uncle



with a smile—"like you. Circumstances have conspired to give me a tub set in a sunny patch of ground. Before it flows a stream of fresh water equally adaptable for drinking or bathing purposes. The ravens bring me my food—punctually on the first of March and September with a certificate from the secretary that income tax has been, or will be, deducted. What more can a perfectly contented mind require?"

"Tobacco," remarked a voice at his elbow.

"Hallo, Violet," he exclaimed, turning round and helping himself to a cigar from the box she held out. "How long have you been standing there? I've just been speaking disparagingly of your father."

"Lady Violet," said Everard, "can you without troubling yourself unduly make arrangements to take Cyril away? No violence, of course, but he has talked incessantly ever since he entered the house."

"And for a long time before," interjected Stanford. "When I was at Oxford my Greats tutor used to lecture on Subjective Idealism. Oh, it's not so bad as it sounds—it's just the theory that the external world exists only in our imagination, that you see that tea-table because you happen to be thinking of it, and as soon as you cease to think of it, it ceases to exist. I remember I used to go back to my rooms gingerly and on tiptoe to see if the poker was in the fireplace and had been there the whole time, or whether it would just jump into position as I opened the door.



I get the same feeling with Cyril. I have been in his company half an hour and he has talked incessantly. I met him at dinner two nights ago and the same thing happened, and a fortnight ago I spent a week-end with him in exactly the same circumstances. Has he, like the objective poker, been talking incessantly in the intervals when I have *not* seen him, or is it a tragic feature of my subjective state that I should be unable to conjure up a picture of Cyril other than in full tongue?"

Cyril looked up to Lady Violet with a plaintive expression.

"Take me away, dear, where I shall be appreciated. Take me by the hand and lead me far from this brute creation, where I can smoke in peace and by a happy reversal of the natural order you can talk to me." He got up and prepared to go, but his uncle could not resist a parting shot.

"Take him away, Lady Violet, and keep him from talking. That is the first step. Then keep him from smoking, that is the second. He smokes far too much."

Cyril turned round.

"My dear Everard, one must do something between meals. You seem to have lost the art of passing time."

"Wait till you are married, my boy, and your wife makes you work all day, and you are glad to get ten minutes in the middle of the day for a hurried luncheon, and as a special concession



you are allowed one pipe in the kitchen after the servants have gone to bed."

"Are these the terms on which one enters the much-vaunted married state?"

"Pass me the old cigar box, let me consider anew,  
Old friends, and who is Maggie that I should abandon you?  
A million surplus women are willing to bear the yoke,  
A woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke!

Come on, Vi dear, and leave Everard to talk on a subject of which he knows nothing save from the groans and anguished cries of the suffering victims."

It had stopped raining and they wandered out on to the terrace, followed by the rest of the party. Lord Darlington alone remained behind, talking to Enid Sutherland.

"Now that we're by ourselves, Enid," he began, "I want to speak to you on rather an important subject. You know the Vice-royalty of India is vacant?"

"Yes, it was in the papers a few weeks ago. Are they going to give you the appointment?"

"I don't know yet. So far as I can make out there are a good many possible men for the post and I am told I stand about third on the list. Warlingham is first favorite; if he refuses, Duckworth has the next claim; and if Duckworth doesn't want it, I gather I may be approached. There are two lives between me and the throne, but neither of these men is young, and India is unusually restive at the present time. Conse-



quently I have to see whether I shall be in a position to accept it if the offer comes my way."

Enid nodded.

"I see. What are you going to do about Violet?"

"That's the difficulty. She's too young and the country's too disturbed for me to take her with me, and I've no relations I would trust to look after her. I've been thinking of setting up a commission of two as her guides, philosophers, friends, and trustees. I want you to be one."

"Who is to be the other?"

"Say you'll accept and then I'll tell you."

"Oh, but that is too much of a leap in the dark! However, I suppose you can be relied on to make choice of a fairly safe and dependable person?"

"That's just what he's not. For twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four you would say he was the unfittest person in the length and breadth of the land for such a position. Then in the twenty-fourth you'd say he was the right man. Will you take the leap blindfold?"

"Yes, if you'll answer one question. Is it Cyril Fitzroy?"

Lord Darlington looked surprised.

"My dear Enid, how did you guess that? Yes, it is Cyril. Now, will you act with him? I don't think you even know him yet, do you?"

"Oh, yes, I do, I've known him some time and I shall be quite content with him as fellow-trustee. He worships Violet as woman was never worshipped before."



"That is his sole redeeming feature. I am afraid I get very impatient with him at times. I like him, and don't want to see him wasting himself as he is doing at present."

Enid began to laugh.

"Dear Lord Procrustes, you are a very bad judge of human nature. Everyone has to fit your bed straight away or you chop off their feet or roll them out till they do. All young men must be filled with a desire to serve their fellow-man: they must go down to the Samurai settlement and spread enlightenment among the uneducated, relieve the suffering, succor the poor, and finally return to Westminster primed with knowledge of working-class conditions acquired at first hand. If they don't——"

Lord Darlington smiled.

"It's a true bill, I'm afraid, Enid. I'm too impatient to make a successful reformer, but life is so short that I cannot bear to see a moment of time or an ounce of energy wasted. And you know, Enid, Procrustes or no Procrustes, there is a whole store of natural benevolence—for lack of a better term—in our young men, and why not organize it and turn it to profitable account?"

"Natural benevolence, yes. But it doesn't always take the form of wanting to do social work in the East End. My charge against you, Lord Darlington, is that you make it your test of natural benevolence in young men, whether they are willing to play billiards with the horny-handed sons of toil or hold services and get up sing-songs



among hop-pickers in Kent. That may suit Mortimer Forrest or John Stanford. It doesn't happen to suit people like Cyril or Rodney Trelawney."

"Oh, I have no complaint against Rodney. He is doing work useful to society every day of his life. An Oxford don has men of all kinds passing through his hands; they come to him from a dozen different schools, each with a fresh, vigorous outlook on life. They fall under the spell of Oxford and drink in its enthusiasms and its prejudices. Rodney's task lies in directing their talents into the proper channel and working to bring the curriculum of the University more into touch with the public needs of our daily life. He has sent me a great deal of promising material. Rodney is exercising a very useful function. I wish I could think the same of Cyril."

"Poor Cyril! He will never darken the doors of your settlement, Lord Procrustes—and yet he is capable of exercising a useful function."

"I doubt it."

"Oh, no, you don't, or you wouldn't put Violet in his charge. I told you you didn't know much about human nature, but you know just enough to realize that in choosing Cyril for this position you have made a wise choice. That is his function."

"What is his function?"

"To find somebody very young and beautiful and rather helpless or in trouble and then look after them. Cyril will make an admirable watch-



dog. Give him beauty in distress to protect and he will protect it. The distress without the beauty doesn't amuse or interest him."

Lord Darlington snorted.

"Is Violet beauty in distress?"

"She is beauty certainly, though not in distress, I am glad to say. But she is rather dependent on others, or I should say on Cyril, and as long as she trusts him as implicitly as at present he will rise to his position."

Lord Darlington picked up a cigarette and lit it.

"Cyril has a better advocate in you than he knows or deserves, Enid."

"Not than he deserves. I owe a good deal to him."

"To Cyril? How long have you known him?"

"Oh, some time now. I first met him shortly before my divorce. All through the proceedings he sat in court to keep me company and used to take me out to dinner in order to distract my mind. He used to read to me in the evenings, in the middle of the London season too, and when I went away into the country he used to send me books and letters eight pages long to amuse me."

"Beauty in distress again. I wish for his sake, Enid, you would marry him and make his flow of natural benevolence a little less intermittent."

"Marry Cyril! how little you know him, Lord Darlington."

"He says he will never marry. Do you believe him?"

"Most men of his age say that. It is vanity



natural to their period of life and imparts a delicate suggestion that they could choose out of a thousand if they cared to fling down their glove, but that nobody they have so far met is quite worthy to pick it up. If Cyril says he is not going to marry, it is partly from vanity and partly because he understands himself almost as little as you understand him."

"And do you understand him, my wise young judge?"

"I think I do, better than anyone else of his friends. I will even imperil my reputation for wisdom by making prophecies. Cyril will marry—when, I know not. But I think I know his destined bride. And her name I tell not." Enid got up with an expression of amusement in her dark eyes. "I will just repeat that it is not me. Cyril has never asked me and never will. We are just very intimate friends, and Cyril never behaves to a woman as if he were in love with her. As we are character-reading and fortune-telling, I will inform you that that is his most dangerous quality. If he is not careful his indifference to women will get him into trouble. Most women have in their veins a few drops of the blood of Phædra and Pharoah's wife, and a cold-hearted man is a challenge to them to put forth all their powers."

"You know too much, Enid. And you have far too high an opinion of our young detrimental."

"Never mind, Lord Darlington. If I have put him on a pedestal I will redress the balance



by debasing one of your idols. Rodney Trelawney will never get into trouble through coldness of heart. That organ suffers in his case from overfeeding and superfluous warmth."

"How do you mean?"

"Just this, that he is so ready to be in love with the first woman he meets that he throws himself at her feet, offers her the ripe devotion of a lifetime, and then, when he has had time to cool down and see that she does not come up to his standard of perfection in all ways, off he rushes and goes through the same performance ten yards away."

"You're a little hard on Rodney, Enid."

"Not unduly. He's a man who is captivated by every pretty face he sees and makes rather an exhibition of himself under its inspiration. He should take time to consider before making himself conspicuous."

"And what will his fate be, Sibyl? Will the pretty face some day make him its victim?"

"That is the risk he runs; but I think some day he will meet a pretty face with brains behind it and sufficient magnetism to keep him from straying away in search of other pretty faces. That will be what Cyril calls Rodney's Ideal."

They had walked to the door and stood for a moment to watch the little groups distributed over the lawn. Myra Woodbridge and Cyril Fitzroy, racquets in hand, walked past them along the terrace in the direction of the tennis court. Lord Darlington watched them pass and then turned to Enid.



“Can you add to your list of prophecies by saying whom Rodney will marry?”

Enid's black eyes were strictly non-committal.

“I think I can, Lord Darlington, but I don't think I shall. These affinities should take place without the rude interference of the well-disposed helping hand.”



## CHAPTER X

### LISTENERS HEAR GOOD OF THEMSELVES

"I promised if you'd see a dinner out  
We'd see truth dawn together."—BROWNING.

"**M**OVE up to this end of the table, Everard, and bring your glass with you." The Earl of Darlington resumed his seat after the temporary disturbance caused by the ladies leaving the room and watched his guests consoling themselves for the absence of the gentler sex with coffee and cigars. "Try one of the long fellows, they're much milder than they look, and we've got the whole evening before us."

"Your daughter makes a most prepossessing hostess, Darlington. I fancy she was still in the schoolroom when I was last here. How long has she been promoted to the head of the table?"

"Oh, only this year. You see, she's not yet sixteen, and it would be a pity to bring her on too quickly. At least that's what your nephew tells me."

"Not quite in those words, Lord Darlington." Cyril Fitzroy moved to a vacant chair between his uncle and their host and selected a cigar with some deliberation. "I fancy I told you that she ought to be forbidden all adult society for another



two or three years. You're robbing her of the most glorious years of her life by bringing her into contact with middle-aged sinners like Everard. I also told you that you were not fit to be trusted with a daughter like Violet."

"You did, with your customary candor. I remember it now. Well, we will start acting on your advice at once; I will tell Violet not to have anything to do with you for three years."

"Ah, but I don't rank as adult society. I'm only twenty-three and feel much younger. That's what you never understand, Lord Darlington, when you tell me to take a serious interest in life. It will be time enough for that when I'm Everard's age and have lost my youth and my figure in the remorseless passage of years."

"I object to this pose of extreme youthfulness. It is put forward as an excuse for leading an unprofitable life and prematurely acquiring all the narrowness and rigidity of middle-aged bachelorhood."

"Save me from my friends," exclaimed Everard Fitzroy. "I object to the assumption of narrowness and rigidity as being part and parcel of bachelor life. Bachelorhood is not an age or condition; it is an art, and nowadays nearly a lost art. What I really resent is the lack of reverence which extreme youthfulness offers to its elders."

"But there is nothing dignified or worthy of respect in middle-age." Cyril leaned forward and reached his coffee-cup. "Middle-age is a



confession of failure; an admission that you have lost the art of being amused and keeping young. The world is a diverting place if you know how to make it amusing—and therein lies the importance of a right choice in the kind of life you lead. 'The condition of perfection is idleness; the aim of perfection is youth.' That is a wise saying. Everard is idle, but still grows middle-aged. He is a failure in life. Lord Darlington is active, what the journalists call 'one of the world's workers,' but he gets careworn and middle-aged. He allows things to worry him; it irritates him to see in me the ideal of perfect unprofitable contentment. Therefore he is a failure in life."

"I really think you cannot be as young as you pretend, Cyril, or you would not have had time to accumulate your present colossal ignorance of the world. Life contains a good deal of bitter fruit, and when you have tasted it you will alter your views on care-worn middle-age and the art of keeping young. To the failure of six-and-forty the art does not appear so simple as to the brilliant success of twenty-three."

"But no art is simple, Lord Darlington, or it would lose its value. The problem of life is to avoid the bitter fruit; until you eat it, it does not exist. Until you feel it for the first time, toothache does not exist. If you eat no fruit at all, you make certain at least of avoiding the bitter."

"You must expound the parable, Cyril."

"Simply this. You come 'into the universe



and Why not knowing nor Whence, like water willy-nilly flowing, and out of it, like wind upon the waste—you know not whither willy-nilly blowing.’ You have a certain number of years to occupy before you are gathered to your fathers and it is to your interest that those years shall pass as pleasantly as possible, and you make such arrangements as seem likely to secure that end. Some marry wives and bring up families, some devote their lives to the advancement of learning, some to public affairs, some to philanthropy and the relief of suffering; we all have our little preferences. Now, I am not a gambler and I wish to take no risks. I do not aim at the big prizes and I have a right to expect to avoid the big losses. These men I have mentioned—the husband, the father, the statesman, and so forth—seek to increase the total of their happiness by attaching themselves to some person or cause external to themselves. This becomes the absorbing interest of their lives. You remember the Indian fairy story of the man who kept his soul locked up in a hidden place to save it from injury? As long as his soul was strong and healthy, he was strong and healthy; but one day an enemy discovered the hiding-place and tortured his soul and tore it limb from limb, and as the soul writhed and lost its members, so the man’s body writhed and dropped piece from piece. That is what the gamblers do. They lock their happiness up in a wife, or in children, or in public affairs; and as long as the hiding-place is



undisturbed and no malignant spirit attacks it, they are happy. But when the evil hour comes, they find themselves torn limb from limb.”

“And the wise man who does not gamble?”

“Oh, he seeks to keep himself independent of all extraneous entanglements. He might possibly increase his happiness by marrying; but to marry a wife is to give a hostage to fortune. The wife might be a bad choice; or, again, she might be a good choice, and then sadden his whole life by dying young. Perhaps you will say that a few years of married bliss will outweigh an age of bereavement. If that is your view—act upon it. The wise man sees it in its true light, as a pure speculation, and avoids it.”

“And do you imagine that it is possible for a man to live in this splendid isolation? You may try to live as a hermit and avoid contact with your fellow-man for fear of becoming involved in his troubles, but are you—is any man strong enough to avoid being dragged by the capricious hand of fate out of your hermitage and plunged into the stormy waters of someone else’s destiny?”

“You must keep the two questions separate, please. I claim that it is possible for a man to suppress what you would call every natural feeling, to love nothing, to hate nothing, to desire nothing, to miss nothing; in a word, to lay up no treasure on earth for fear of thieves breaking in and moths corrupting. The other question is one of luck. You have no control over it, and if you are anxious for excitement, it is this pos-



sibility of disturbance which will provide it. Personally I have no such desire, and my sole misgiving is that I may be placed against my will in a position where the isolation of my life will be violated."

Lord Darlington knocked the ash off his cigar.

"What do you think of the doctrine, Everard?"

"I agree with you that such colossal ignorance is precocious and almost uncanny. He is a perfectly safe companion for your daughter."

"Then my point is gained." Cyril smiled and stood up to stretch himself. "I am going to talk to Violet now, and she is going to play to me, and then I shall send her to bed."

"Suppose she refuses to go?"

"I shall exercise my authority. Remember, I am her prospective guardian." He moved towards the door.

"What is the allusion to the prospective guardian?" asked Everard Fitzroy as he and Lord Darlington prepared to follow Cyril out of the room.

"Oh, I told him that he would have to act if I got sent to India, but I don't know that there is any likelihood of my having to take so drastic a course."

"By the way, there has been no hint as yet who the new man will be?"

"No, the likely people are all jibbing. India is a tough place to govern at the present moment—and there are so many of the unlikely people such as myself that there are no limits to the field of speculation."



There was a slight stir in the drawing-room as the men entered and selected positions for that most trying of ordeals, the five-minute exhumation of dinner table conversation spanning the interval until someone has the initiative to propose music or bridge. Lady Violet Anstruther and Myra Woodbridge were standing by one of the open French windows discussing the prospects of thunder. It has been hot all day in the intervals between the showers and the coming of rain seemed likely to occur at any moment. Cyril Fitzroy contemplated them at his leisure from the opposite end of the room and then strolled up to join them.

"Vi, I have two requests to make—the first, that you gratify the assembled company by going to the piano and discoursing sweet music; the second, that you then slip noiselessly from the room and go to bed. You're looking too tired to be keeping late hours in hot rooms. Don't you agree with me, Miss Woodbridge?"

"I agree as regards the sweet music and I agree over the hot room, but it isn't really late yet. Also, I know that in my own case I should resent being ordered to bed in my own house by one of my guests."

"Violet does resent it—don't you, Vi? but she recognizes the wisdom of the advice and she is going to act upon it. If only you were Violet's age, Miss Woodbridge, you would be privileged to have the same boundless confidence in me that she has." Cyril made a low bow and offered



his arm to escort her to the piano. Lady Violet smiled and took it.

"Excuse my leaving you, Miss Woodbridge, but I will come back as soon as I've finished playing. You probably know Cyril well enough to recognize that he usually gets what he wants by having no shame in asking for it. He also fancies he can wear down all opposition by dint of hard talking, but there he is wrong—as you will see." She seated herself at the piano and struck a chord. Cyril stood leaning against the piano and watching her.

"What's it to be, Cyril? Something dreamy to suit a hot evening and after-dinner somnolence—Marrakésh waltz, 'L'heure d'amour'? No, I know what you want." She struck another chord and began the opening bars of the "Rosenkavalier" waltz. Cyril left his position at the end of the piano and walked quickly to the music stool.

"Not that thing, Vi, I don't like it. I'm tired of it. Give us 'L'heure d'amour.' "

Lady Violet paused in her playing for a fraction of time to consider whether to go on or change the waltz. In that moment the voice of Myra Woodbridge was heard saying:

"Do go on, Lady Violet, I love the 'Rosenkavalier' waltz."

Violet looked up into Cyril's face with a defiant smile and continued playing. Cyril gave her a slightly mocking smile in reply, took a cigarette case from his pocket, selected a cigarette, and



walked away to the farthest window. It stood open and he passed through, lighting the cigarette as he went. A broad terrace surrounded two sides of the house, and it was not until he had turned the corner and placed the angle of the house between himself and the offending music that he slackened his pace and seated himself on the stone parapet which separated the terrace from the long lawn sloping down to the river.

The cigarette had come to an end and he was feeling in his pocket for a cigar when a step sounded on the gravel behind him, and he heard the sound of Myra Woodbridge's voice.

"The 'Rosenkavalier' has lost its charm, I see, Mr. Fitzroy?"

Cyril turned round and shifted his position slightly, so as to place Myra in the full light of the moon while he himself remained in shadow.

"Air-proof and smoke-proof rooms have lost their charms, rather, Miss Woodbridge. As you know, I have no manners, and if I may not indulge my vices in public I prefer solitude to self-sacrifice."

"That no doubt explains why you were out of earshot of the music. I had an idea, somehow, that the waltz was a favorite of yours."

Cyril's face became quite expressionless.

"I never remember hearing it before; but, then, I go out so little and never attend dances in London, so that the new music is an unexplored territory to me."

"If this were a criminal court, Cyril, and you



were trying to prove an alibi, I should understand the form of what you say, even if I did not understand the reason. Not being a criminal court, this gratuitous perjury seems a work of supererogation."

Cyril laughed.

"My dear Myra, you do not understand the artistic temperament. I told you at your aunt's ball that I was a mere interlude in your life, a chance voice heard for a few hours on a summer's morning, and having cast myself for that rôle, it is like a cut with a knife not to play it out to the end. I disapprove of the stage convention which encourages the dead to rise from their graves and take their calls."

"But I warned you that we should meet again, somewhere."

"True, but I took that as an unpardonable interference with my reading of the part. When I think out an elaborate pose I cannot allow any tampering with its details."

By this time Cyril had cut the cigar and was striking a match. Myra waited until he had sheltered the flame with his hands and unguardedly allowed his face to be illuminated. Then she asked:

"What was the reason for the pose? I confess it is beyond me, and to the untrained mind seems rather lacking in point."

"What is the reason for any pose? I suppose it is, Myra, that our real lives are so much alike and our souls so uninteresting that we have to



pretend to be what we are not if we wish to excite any attention. If you could get a box of sardines to talk, half of them would claim to be shrimps and the other half mullet. Anything to get away from uniform reality. And that little harmless vanity is one of our strongest instincts."

"That explains posing in general, but not this pose in particular. I don't quite appreciate what it was and how it was intended to excite my attention."

"My dear Myra, it was simplicity itself. Most of your partners at a dance act as if you were the realization of their most cherished ideals, as if they could be happy only so long as you were graciously pleased to dance with them, and as if their highest hope were that they should some day count for something in your life. Do you admit the soft impeachment?"

Myra nodded.

"Some of them do."

"Very well. That is their pose. Mine was the antithesis. I told you that I came to you as a stop-gap, to give you occupation until the partner you were expecting should arrive. I tried to make it clear that I offered you no devotion, that I felt no desire to count for anything in your life, and when I parted from you in the morning I told you as unmistakably as words could convey that I had said my lines, played my part, and was retiring 'off.' "

"You said that whenever I heard the 'Rosenkavalier' played it would remind me of you.



I think that was inartistic; it marred the air of finality."

"I also kissed your hand—dropping on one knee to do it. The mention of the 'Rosenkavalier' was irrelevant—I admit it—and was only a manifestation of man's evergreen vanity and his desire to leave a tender impression and to rank as a romantic memory. I don't excuse it. It was bad art. But the hand-kissing was superb: it was pure inspiration, and one of the finest 'curtains' I have ever devised."

Myra began to laugh.

"My friend, you divert me. This was all a pose, you say?"

"What was all a pose?"

"This pretended indifference and this affectation of coming into my life for one night only."

Cyril pondered for a moment.

"What a lot of subtlety you crowd into an innocent question. If I say it was a pose you will seize on my words, claim that my indifference was unreal and that I was really carried off my feet at sight of you. If I say it was not a pose—well—I shall have to eat every word I have said to you during these last ten minutes. I must ask for notice of that question, as our worthy Ministers say."

"That is equivalent to admitting that it was a pose and nothing more. Now the reason of it."

"The real reason?"

"Of course."

Cyril flicked the ash off his cigar and began to speak more seriously and slowly than before.



"My dear Myra, if you knew how adorable you looked that night you would not wonder at anyone coming and asking you to dance with him. That's reason number one. Then you know, I'd seen you with Rodney Trelawney earlier in the day, and having some experience of Rodney's fastidiousness in the matter of women, I wanted to see if I could approve of his latest choice. Is that sufficient explanation?"

"No, Cyril, it explains nothing of what I must continue to regard as an irrational pose, quite unlike the usual fruit of your well-ordered mind."

"My dear, the pose was an unfamiliar gambit in the familiar game of soul-hunting. If I had offered you life-long adoration or looked at you with soft, yearning eyes, I know exactly what result I should have obtained, and I know equally that I should have got no insight into that most interesting soul of yours. But by pretending complete indifference to your not inconsiderable charms, I wanted to see if you would assume the offensive."

"And have I?"

Cyril laughed.

"Surely that is a question which you can best answer."

Myra thought for a moment.

"And quite candidly that was your only motive? You see, I'm a little given to soul-dissection myself, and I should so like to see what's at the back of your mind."

"Oh, I have no soul. That's generally admitted.



I am just material man seeking to suit himself to his environment, and a soul is a luxury I cannot afford. It brings too much unhappiness with it, and material man is not out for unnecessary unhappiness. You should have stayed on a little longer in the dining-room to-night and heard my homily to Everard and Lord Darlington on the need for cultivating insensibility to all emotions. It would have edified you, particularly the sixthly and lastly on the unwisdom of setting your affections on anything or anyone in the whole wide world other than yourself."

"May I have a synopsis?"

"Oh, certainly, but you must look as if you disapproved of the doctrine. Like all religions, it only thrives under persecution."

"I'll hear first and persecute—if need be—afterwards."

"Well, it's just this. I think the subject started in a discussion of marriage. It usually does—and middle-aged bachelors and widowers seem to have nothing else to occupy their minds; I just suggested that happiness only comes to the man who has strangled all affections and trodden every appetite under foot. If you marry, you are giving a hostage to misfortune in your wife and every one of your children. If you grow fond of a cat or a book or a house, or the sight of a flower in spring, you are giving hostages to misfortune. The cat may die, the book may be lost, the house burned down. The flower will most certainly fade."



“‘For the man who cannot take pleasure in the sight and scent of a rose because he knows it must soon die—there is no hope.’ Who said that?”

“I really don’t know, Myra, but it’s perfectly true. Unfortunately it’s a matter of temperament. No one except the very vain likes to be described as hopeless, but if it’s part of your temperament to foul the source of every pleasure by reflecting it must end some day, well, I think it’s better to deaden yourself alike to the sensations of pleasure and of pain.”

Myra looked at him for a moment or two in silence.

“Don’t you find life a little empty, a little lonely, Cyril? Do you never feel one of the down-trodden affections rising up and calling for nourishment?”

“Sometimes, though to admit it is to confess that my religion has not been dutifully followed.”

“And what happens then?”

“Then, Myra, I perjure myself and I tell people that I am nothing to them and they are nothing to me, and by dint of saying it loud enough and often enough I hope to make myself believe it. Have you any more questions to ask the witness? If not, may he leave the box?”

“Yes, if he feels faint, or if he’s tired of the conversation.”

“Oh, not that, Myra, but I thought you had extracted all the information I was capable of giving you, and I fancied my soul had been



fished out of the camphor-bottle and was now balancing itself on a cork with the aid of a half-inch pin."

"My dear boy, you've told me nothing about your soul, you've only told me what it looks like to your own inexperienced eyes."

"I told you that I had no soul, or rather that it was to all intents and purposes dead, in spite of an occasional flicker. You don't like my philosophy of life?"

"I think you have never known what love is."

"Love is forbidden by article one of the creed."

"I agree with your aunt that you have never known the influence of a strong emotion of any kind, but that when you do, you will slough off the old skin and show us what is underneath."

"Now you are inciting me to bandy prophecies with you—one of the vainest forms of time-wasting, as I know who spend all my life wasting time so as to leave myself no opportunity for thinking how ill-contrived a place the world is. But what is wrong with the old skin that you and Evelyn and everyone are so anxious that I should slough it off?"

"There is nothing wrong so far as I am concerned. I find you a most entertaining person. Whether you will continue long to entertain yourself is another question, and that is why I should like to see the old skin go. Your philosophy is a harmless freak at three-and-twenty, but in ten years' time it will be a tragedy."

"See volume one of the Earl of Darlington's



Aphorisms and Reflections. You will never be of the faith, Myra. You are beginning to be anxious about my fate, and anxiety about anyone's fate is forbidden by article two. I shall never feel a moment's disquiet about you."

Myra gave him an ironical bow.

"Not because the system forbids you to worry, but because you know my philosophy is going to guide me to a right judgment in all things, as the collect says."

"Your philosophy is going to guide you to Rodney Trelawney, so at least Evelyn tells me. Whether that is synonymous with happiness I cannot say; but I should prefer to describe it as a gamble mitigated by a disposition to say, 'I have lost my stake, but the excitement was worth it.' That's not my temperament; I can't do it, and that is where the difference between us lies."

Myra rose from the stone parapet where she had been sitting.

"Im going to bed, Cyril. Not because the conversation is exhausted, but because I see your uncle and Lord Darlington coming this way, and much as I esteem them both, I dislike (to use your language for a moment) having dialogue interrupted and converted into 'confused noises' with everyone talking at the same time and gasping for breath. Good-night."

"Good-night, Myra dear. You will have ample opportunity to complete the dissection later on. Now that you have destroyed the



dramatic unity of my appearance in St. James's Square, and now that I have explained in brief outline my philosophy of life, there can be no objection to our meeting again and extracting as much amusement as possible out of each other's conversation."

Lord Darlington and Everard Fitzroy came up to the place where Cyril was sitting, just as Myra Woodbridge disappeared round the angle of the house. Cyril's last words had been audible to both of them.

"I did not know that Miss Woodbridge was a friend of yours, Cyril."

"She's not. I've only met her once before, at her aunt's house. She is merely an acquaintance."

Everard Fitzroy nodded wisely.

"Do you habitually greet mere acquaintances as 'Myra dear,' Cyril?"

"Invariably, my dear Everard, when they're as beautiful as Myra Woodbridge. Don't you?"

Everard turned to his host.

"And this is the young man who talked to us of the wisdom of celibacy and the need for emotional suppression. I'm not surprised, Cyril, but pained—intensely pained."

"Wait till the wolf comes, Everard, before you cry out. There's nothing inconsistent in preaching celibacy and admiring the adorable Myra. Beautiful women are a direct incitement to bachelorhood. By the laws of this barbarous land you mayn't marry more than one woman at a time, and by ancient prejudice if you marry



one woman you must be blind to the charms of all others and sit sick at heart watching your wife grow old and toothless before your eyes. If you are a bachelor, you move from one to another, feasting your eyes on their beauty. When one grows old, you thrust her aside and put another younger and fairer in her place. Life is perpetual springtime for a bachelor."

"While he's still young himself, Cyril. Will girls like Miss Woodbridge come and talk to you when you're my age?" Everard Fitzroy almost allowed the sigh to escape him. "I find their inclination grows weaker."

"We are back in the old circle." Cyril got up and walked with them towards the open French window. "You threaten me with the terrors of middle-age, as if you were an ecclesiastic threatening me with the torments of hell. Middle-age, as I told you before, is not a stage of time, but a confession that life, the brain, the power of enjoyment are all atrophied. It arises from your habit of taking yourself seriously. If I fall into the same fatal error I must reconcile myself to the punishment, instead of which I propose to find myself a book and retire with it to my bed."

Myra Woodbridge had wandered through the drawing-room and attached herself to the rapidly dissolving group at the foot of the stairs. Although it was only eleven o'clock, a widespread decision in favor of bed had made itself felt, and she was not sorry to be swept along in the general stream and allowed to combat the overpowering



heat of the night with vestments of a character even more filmy than she had been able to wear earlier in the evening. Sleep was out of the question, and she composed herself to listen to the gradually dying murmur of voices which for a time continued to hum distantly through the house. She sat in darkness, but under her door stole a ray of light from the open door the other side of the passage, showing that Cyril Fitzroy at least still felt the need of illumination. In the deep silence which presently enveloped the house she could hear him turning over the pages of a book; twice he knocked the ashes out of a pipe, and she caught the sound of a match being struck. On the terrace underneath her open window a gentle footfall could be heard, now growing more distinct and then dying away in the distance. She could not distinguish the face or figure of the solitary sentinel, but a glowing point of light showed that he was smoking as he patrolled.

Myra drew her head back from the window just in time to see the light from Cyril's door disappear and to hear a gentle patter of bare feet down the passage. A minute passed and then the lights in the library under her room were turned on and shone through the windows on to the terrace. The sentinel paused in the triangle of light and she saw it was Everard Fitzroy. Then a figure airily clad in white silk pajamas and a wrist-watch appeared beside him, and uncle and nephew sat down on one of the



terrace seats. Their voices were subdued in deference to the lateness of the hour, but every word floated distinctly up to her window as they talked.

"Give me something to smoke, please, Everard, and then explain why you are keeping such unseasonable hours. The house must be full of bad consciences, I'm thinking."

"My conscience is all right, my dear boy; but why aren't you in bed?"

"Oh, I tried bed but only with moderate success, and I'd finished the first volume of this new history everyone's talking about, and it seemed a good opportunity for coming down to the library and changing it. What wickedness keeps you afoot so late?"

"Nothing, nothing. I have been smoking and thinking—that's all. By the way, I sha'n't see you after to-morrow. I leave for Scotland by the mail, spend a fortnight in the north, and then return to collect a clean handkerchief and a collar and go to India."

"Lucky man, Everard! I'd give my eyes to go to India, only I never get the chance, and here are you going a second time. How long is it since your first visit?"

"Oh, twenty years—five-and-twenty, almost. I'm half sorry to be going."

"Why so?"

"In brief, and to use your own formula, my boy, because I'm a middle-aged failure. I'm afraid it will be a very different thing this time.



I was about your age when I went before, the whole world before me. I'd just made a pot of money and fancied myself an eligible bachelor. So I was, for that matter, and I was more or less fêted wherever I went. That's altered a bit now and I've got rather left, so that I fear the second impression of India may take the gilt off the first."

Cyril reflected for a short space.

"Why do you go?" he asked. "A thoroughly pleasant memory is too rich and rare a sensation to imperil light-heartedly."

"I'm going because I'm a little bit tired of England, Cyril. I've got the feeling that I'm not wanted here any longer. My own contemporaries—my brothers and friends—are all growing old. They've got their families and their wives and they seem to be growing rather apart from me. It's not a pleasant feeling, Cyril, and I hope you will never have it; but you will if you don't marry. You will wake up some fine morning and find that you are indispensable to no one—as I've done. Of course at your age you won't consider that any disadvantage. You find it a pleasant sensation to go your own sweet way without caring a damn for anybody and without anybody caring a damn for you. It makes you feel deliciously independent, but I warn you—if you're in the mood for a fresh dose of good advice—that you begin to feel lonely and cold by the time you've turned five-and-forty."

"What's the remedy, Everard?"



Cyril's voice sounded to Myra unusually sober.

"The remedy, my dear boy, is to get married. Don't repeat your views—if they really are your views—about setting not your heart on the perishable flowers of the world. It's better to cultivate and cherish a rose and to enjoy its scent and beauty even if it ultimately dies, than to be content with a wax flower which never fades—it is true—but never gives you a moment's gratification in a lifetime. We've all got to die, Cyril, and my complaint against your philosophy is not that it is rottenly unsound, not that it is going to make yours an unhappy life, but simply that you play the game of life and don't want to obey the rules."

"Go on, Everard, I'm listening."

"Well, as I've unburdened myself so far, you may as well hear the end of the chapter. You are perfectly right in saying that as you limit your sympathies and emotions—dry up the milk of human kindness, as the itinerant preachers would say—you limit the sense of loss and disappointment when an object of your affection comes to grief. But I put it to you. Is it worth it? You deprive yourself of all the sweets of life, and then when you get on in years and see everyone else enjoying the fruit which might have been yours, you feel like a Nazarite in a winepress. Look at my own case and then ask yourself if you're going to be more successful. If it's a rule of the game to get married and stand the racket of a family, you can't expect to have the best of both



worlds by staying a bachelor in your youth and still getting in at the finish when the other bachelors have left you behind and mapped out a different course for themselves. Never mind the mixed metaphors, but do I make myself clear?"

In the darkness Myra heard a faint sound of assent.

"Well, that's one rule of the game which I've tried to break and which you're trying to break. Your other fault is more common. As I told you, we're all mortal. You're going to die, probably before your work—whatever it may be—is finished. So am I. Well, do the best you can in the interval. If you love your wife and she dies before you, well—so much the worse for you, and make the most you can of the time you're together. Sometimes the luck will be on your side and you'll finish your work in time. Every time it comes off it's fair gain. But for heaven's sake don't imagine that you're entitled to a special providence which is going to insure you against all risks free of charge, and don't have a grievance when death or disaster comes and lays hands on your most cherished possessions."

Cyril allowed an interval to follow on his uncle's outburst before replying, and when he broke silence his voice had lost its customary bantering tone.

"You've shattered an idol, Everard; you've shown me the feet of clay. Do you know, when people talked about the melancholy which comes over bachelors in middle life, I always pointed to you as a glorious exception."



“Point to me, my boy, as an example—a hideous example—of the universal rule, and be warned by me. Get married before it is too late—get married at once.”

“Not so easy to do in a hurry. I’m not conscious of being exactly run after.”

“Why don’t you marry Miss Woodbridge?”

The position of Myra as involuntary eavesdropper had become suddenly uncomfortable. She could not help hearing Cyril’s reply, whatever it might be; she could not break up the séance without revealing to Mr. Fitzroy that his confidences had reached unexpected ears; there was nothing for it but to sit silent while she became the current topic of conversation between the two men. Cyril did not answer his uncle’s question for a moment or two, and then broke out into a long low laugh.

“My dear Everard, for as many reasons as you have hairs on your head. Reason number one, because she’s already bespoke. Rodney Trelawney has been worshipping at her shrine for a length of time which for Rodney is unparalleled. She is a little—what’s the word?—distant with him at present, so it was the chance of a lifetime for me to come in and make the running hot for him. But I don’t seriously propose to spoil sport, and my task as runner-up ends in a few hours’ time. Can you see to read a letter? No? well, it will save me the trouble of fetching it, but anyway I heard last night from my aunt, your excellent sister-in-law Evelyn. She is sum-



moning me back to London on an entirely frivolous excuse. Now, I don't pretend to see farther through a brick wall than most people, but I'm prepared to bet any money that she has heard Myra and I are staying under the same roof, and she proposes to get rid of my pernicious influence. Rodney is as the apple of Evelyn's eye, and she is simply wrapped up in the idea of getting him married to Myra. Hence I return to town by the 10.40, deplored by all the house-party. Incidentally the car which takes me to the station fetches Rodney out. So much I gleaned from Darlington last night. There's my first reason."

"It's no reason at all, Cyril. You must find something better than that. Rodney has not got a vested interest in Miss Woodbridge, and you've a perfectly equal right to try your luck with her if you're so disposed."

"If I'm so disposed; that's just it, Everard, I'm not. I regard the Rodney-Myra combination as almost ideal. Rodney's a dear, and he simply adores her; and I'm sure she returns it to a certain extent. But the Cyril-Myra combination is unthinkable."

"Why so?"

"Because I've no—no depth of feeling for her. She's a sweet, pretty girl and I love talking to her and dancing with her and so forth; but you can't marry on that, and I seriously don't believe I would cross the street on her behalf if it caused me the slightest inconvenience. She leaves me quite cold."



"Can you name any woman you would cross the street for, or anyone who doesn't leave you cold?"

"At the moment, no."

"Then you start with a clean slate and I suggest that you should devote yourself to winning the young affections of Miss Woodbridge."

"Why Miss Woodbridge in particular?"

"My dear boy, because she's a charming girl and I think she likes you."

"She'll soon be cured of that. Why, she knows nothing about me. We've just met here and there and amused ourselves with a little conversational sparring, but she'll want to know me better before marriage comes on the tapis, and the better she knows me the less willing she will be to face the prospect."

Cyril laughed rather bitterly and got up from the seat as though the subject had been exhausted. His uncle fired a parting shot.

"Don't grow vain about your bad qualities, but follow my advice in general and in this particular instance."

Cyril paused before stepping through the library window.

"Don't spoil the conversion, Everard, by trying to make it too sudden or too complete. I'm taking your general advice quite seriously, but you've misfired in the particular instance. She shall have every opportunity of studying my uniformly lovable nature, and I will do my best



to get into the receptive state of humility proper to those about to enter into holy wedlock, but I'm not prepared to make any bets on my prospects of success."



## CHAPTER XI

### A PRETTY EXAMPLE OF SELF-DENIAL

“Tardet ingenuos pudor.”—CATULLUS.

**A**T half-past ten the same morning Cyril—Fitzroy drove up to the station in one of Lord Darlington's cars. He was met by an old friend in the person of the station master.

“Good morning, Mr. Fitzroy, sir. Are you going by the 10.40 to London?”

“That's the idea, Mr. Wilson.”

“Then I'm afraid you may be a bit late getting under way, sir. There's been a mess-up two miles down the line, goods engine left the rails, and the up-traffic is a bit delayed. I hope it's nothing urgent taking you to town, sir, nothing that won't wait?”

“The only essential part of my journey is already accomplished, Mr. Wilson. It is the *terminus a quo* that matters, not the *terminus ad quem*. I can't put it more clearly than that because I am not quite sure myself why I am returning. Is the down-express signaled yet?”

“Just coming round the bend now, sir.”

“Then I think I'll cross over and meet it. I'm expecting a friend.”



He ran over the bridge into the arms of Rodney Trelawney, who was engaged in entrusting an immaculate suit-case to the care of a porter.

"Hallo, Cyril, I never expected to see you here!"

"My dear Rodney, my surprise entrances and exits add a charm and romance to the lives of all my friends, without exception. This is one of your lucky days: not only have you met me, but you're going to stay and talk to me till my train comes in."

"Where are you off to?"

"Lunnen-town, on a matter of the greatest unimportance. No, I haven't been thrown out by the Anstruther household with three minutes grace to get myself and belongings out of the park before the bloodhounds are unleashed. They seemed quite sorry to lose me."

"They are always so polite. But who is there?"

"Oh, a host of people. I have left my uncle, the eupeptic Everard, to represent the family in my absence. I fancy he leaves later in the day. Talking of which, when did you last dine with Evelyn?"

"The night before last. Why?"

"Oh, I knew she must have seen you lately, and I rather fancied it was the night before last. That was when she wrote asking me to come to town immediately."

"On a matter of the gravest unimportance?"

"Exactly, though I have business of my own as well. I'm going to be married."



"Anyone in particular?"

"No. I am just Dr. Syntax in Search of a Wife. Youth, beauty, and wealth naturally preferred, but not indispensable. Everard gives it as his mature opinion that celibacy is exploded, so there's just nothing more to be said—except that if this is the case with the green tree, it's high time you were settling down."

Rodney's face grew serious.

"There doesn't seem to be any great rush for me at present."

"Oh, business will brighten up after lunch, the house is filled with eligible young women. If you want money, you'll find a Miss Waldteufel—German and Hebraistic extraction, simply stiff with it. If you like red hair, there's a Miss—no, I find on reflection that I do not allow myself to know red-headed people by name, but she's the real thing, like the sun setting over the Sierra Nevada. If you want beauty and all the virtues and graces, you'll find the adorable Miss Woodbridge."

"Myra Woodbridge? Lady Delaunay's niece?"

"The same."

Without a word Rodney walked out of the station and spoke for a few moments to Lord Darlington's chauffeur. It was impossible to hear what was said, but the man smiled and a coin changed hands. Then the engine was started and to Cyril's amazement the car drove away. Rodney strolled back as though nothing had happened.



"What's the time of your train, Cyril?"

"Ten-forty, but liable to be late owing to an accident down the line. What have you done to the car?"

"I've bribed the man to say I never came here, and when I get to town I shall wire to say I am unavoidably detained. I depend on you, Cyril, not to give me away."

"But, my dear Rodney, what's the matter with you?"

Rodney thought for a moment.

"Look here. This is told you seriously and in confidence. Consequently I don't want you to exercise your humor at my expense or make a good story out of this morning's meeting. I recognize that I am completely in your hands if you choose to do so, but I ask it as a favor."

Cyril nodded.

"I have particular reasons for not wanting to meet Miss Woodbridge at present. Later on it may be different, but if I had known she was to be here, I'd never have accepted Darlington's invitation."

Cyril burst out laughing.

"My dear Rodney, this is the best thing I've heard for months. I'm not laughing at you, I'm laughing at us both, and at Myra Woodbridge most of all."

"I don't see the joke."

"My dear boy, it's really rich. You remember Lady Delaunay's ball?"

"Do I not?"



"Well, you turned up late and I amused myself by philandering with the fair Myra. I didn't want to spoil the market for you, so I took a self-denying oath not to see her again if I could possibly avoid it. Do you know, Rodney, for one whole blessed suffocating week of the season I never went out for fear of meeting her? She's far too attractive to be allowed out alone, bringing desolation to the hearth of confirmed bachelors, so I stayed out of temptation's way. Then came this party of Darlington's and I promised to come along before I knew she was to be of the party and I fairly ran into it. Thus far history; now for speculation. Evelyn knew Myra was staying here, but she didn't know I was here too till you told her—as I suppose you must have?"

Rodney nodded.

"I thought so. Well, she seized pen and paper and ordered my return to town immediately, if not sooner, in order to leave the field clear for you. Hence my appearance at this unseemly hour. But I find you engaged in the same ignominious retreat. As soon as I tell you Myra is here, you decide to take the first train back to town. Are you leaving the field clear for a third party, and if so, who is he?"

Rodney did not appear to be amused.

"My dear Cyril, this is rather a private matter, which I cannot discuss at the moment. You must be content with my saying that I do not want to meet her at present."

A long silence followed, during which Cyril scrutinized his companion's face narrowly.



"Rodney, are you by any chance leaving the field clear for *me*? I don't press for an answer, but if you are, or if you fancy that she's got any preference for me over you, I'll put your mind at rest by saying I'm not for competition. I suppose I am bound to run up against Myra now and again—it would look rather strange if I didn't—but I can promise you that I won't seek her out, and I can assure you that every opportunity she has of getting to know me better is an opportunity for getting to like you better."

"Thanks for the offer, but it seems to leave us where we were before, doesn't it?"

"Certainly not. You've just got to walk up to the house and say you've come by a later train. Choose a probable one, but for heaven's sake don't run away from her. At present we're like two people trying to get into a room and each refusing with a wealth of politeness to precede the other. Meanwhile Myra remains in splendid isolation. I resign all claims; go in and win."

"My dear boy, you don't understand a delicate hint when you get one. If you must know, I've already tried and failed. Now, do you want me to go up to the house?"

Cyril whistled long and reflectively.

"I had no idea it had gone as far as that. I honestly don't know what answer to give."

"Here's the answer I propose to take." Rodney picked up his suit-case as the London train steamed into the station. "Smoker, I suppose, Cyril? And if you can think of any more helpful



advice between here and London, you may wake me up to receive it."

He flung his suite-case savagely into a corner seat and clambered after Cyril into the carriage.



## CHAPTER XII

### ANOTHER GOOD RESOLUTION AND ITS FATE

"I, who have love—and no more,  
Give you but love of you, sweet."—SWINBURNE.

A MONTH had elapsed since he left Lord Darlington's week-end party and Cyril Fitzroy sat at his bureau in the Temple, writing rapidly. A pile of letters in front of him testified to his previous exertions, but the composition of the present one appeared to offer difficulties, and several pauses interrupted his usually fluent pen before the end was reached and the last stamp affixed. He rose rather wearily from his chair and looked out of the open window over the muddy waters of the river, watching the light of the afternoon sun playing on the gently moving waves. Suddenly the bell of his telephone rang out and he stepped over to the receiver. "Hallo! yes, that's me, Cyril Fitzroy. Oh, it's you, Myra. Yes, I shall be here till dinner-time. I've just written you a long letter, but if you're coming here I'll save the stamp. Where are you? Oh, Ladies' Union Club. All right. I'll expect you in ten minutes' time."

He replaced the receiver and settled himself in an armchair, slowly filling a pipe the while.



The ten minutes had hardly passed when he heard a step on the stair and Myra floated into the room, carrying a large bouquet of roses, which she placed in a bowl on his writing table.

"Don't forget to give them fresh water," she said, "they're my peace-offering for disturbing you when you ought to be taking your pre-prandial nap. I had to come. The Gilfillans have invited me to go to Scotland with them and I've promised to make you throw over all your previous engagements and come too. Be sweet and say you will or I shall never be able to face Amy Gilfillan again."

"I can't, Myra. I'm sorry, but I'm going away. I had just written to say good-bye when you rang me up. It's rather sudden, but Stretton asked me this morning to go with him to South Africa as private secretary, or something of the kind, and I sail in a week's time."

"You are going to South Africa—to be useful? Oh, Cyril, how inartistic and how unlike you! What's the attraction?"

"None that I know of." He looked lovingly round his rooms. "These quarters have served me many a long day and I have no sort of wish to leave them."

"Then why are you going?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Constant dripping will wear away any stone. I dined with Darlington last night."

"And what did he talk about?"

"Zoology and biology and industrial unrest."



The social parasite is exploded. The working-classes of this country have been reading books which they don't understand and drawing inferences which won't hold water; but they have convinced themselves that in the animal kingdom the individual beasts of a tribe are broadly equal and they want to know why the individual young of the human tribe are not equal too. They say that the young of the human tribe *would* be equal but for the unequal distribution of this world's good things. As it is, the rich child has its body nourished with good milk and wrapped in warm clothing; its brain is fed and trained; body and mind are subjected to no exertions which they are incapable of supporting, with the result that a few generations of this scientific breeding and rearing produces a superior being like myself. Look at the other side of the picture, and you see under-nourished parents living in insanitary houses and raising far more children than they can feed. Continence being unintelligible to them, they have to struggle with these ever-increasing families, giving them insufficient food and clothing, until such time as they are old enough to go out and earn money and start a fresh generation on the same lines. The result is that a few centuries of under-nourishment and under-education produce the average working-man as we know him."

"There is nothing very new in all this."

"Quite right. I could have told it to our friend the working-man many years ago, but I regarded



it as dangerous knowledge for him to possess. Dives should never explain to Lazarus how he may come to live in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day. Unhappily, the philanthropists of the nineteenth century, the Darlings of another generation, sold the pass, or rather gave it away for nothing but the pleasure of gratifying an obese conscience."

"And the Cyril Fitzroys of this generation have to suffer. But what has this to do with Lord Stretton and South Africa?"

"Cyril Fitzroy in South Africa represents the last stand of the Old Guard. Cyril is going to the working-man, and is going to tell him (tongue in cheek) that his deductions from zoology are impeccable, that there is no reason beyond the present unequal distribution of wealth why Tommy Smith the dustman's boy should not live in Temple Gardens while Cyril Fitzroy collects Tommy Smith's waste-paper and disused sardine-tins. 'But,' I shall say, 'these things take time. It will take a year or two to give Tommy my brain and my education, and meanwhile the brain-work of the world must go on.' In the fulness of time I shall persuade our friend that there is such a thing as brain-work, and that Tommy's gray matter is not so plentiful as the celestial Cyril Fitzroy's. Our friend will then descend to personalities and ask what particular form of brainwork I am doing to justify the good milk, warm clothes, comfortable houses, and expensive education which I have received; what ser-



vice to the community I can show for the very tolerable position I occupy and the inadequate but none the less substantial means which I enjoy."

"And how will you answer our friend?"

"I shall say, 'At the moment, nothing; but in a week's time I sail for South Africa.' Hence my refusal, Myra, to avail myself of Mrs. Gilfillan's hospitality. Has she changed her cook yet?"

"Yes. Does that weigh with you?"

"Only in a disinterested manner. I was thinking of you and the other guests. I have no doubt even her late cook would appear tolerable to me in comparison with what I shall have to endure in South Africa."

Myra leaned back in her chair and surveyed him with an amused smile.

"Are you really going, Cyril?"

"My dear, should I have inflicted this handbook of sociology on you otherwise? I am going in a week's time: six days, to be accurate."

"Accuracy above all things. Why are you going?"

"Myra, you've slept through the sermon. I am going because I have been found out; the position of a parasite growth on a highly civilized social organism is no longer tenable. I go to justify myself in the eyes of our friend the working-man, who thinks—quite rightly—that I get a good deal from society and give nothing in return."

"'Après vous le déluge.' It will last *your* time, my friend. Now tell me the real reason."



"One should never tell one's real reason any more than one should tell one's real age."

"True. One's age is what one appears to be: a specious and probable computation of time, if you want long words. You must apply the same standard to your reason."

"But my reason was specious, probable, *and* true. Besides, you wouldn't like to hear the real reason."

"I insist. My dear boy, I don't want you to bury yourself in South Africa, but if you go I *must* have the consolation of knowing why."

"I am running away from danger, Myra, as I always do."

Cyril was speaking more seriously now.

"Is the danger personal or material? Have you forged a check or compromised a reputation, or what?"

"It's personal, Myra. It's a woman. I don't think her reputation is compromised as yet, but I want to get out of the way before she and I drift on to the point of committing a great folly. A great tragedy," he added.

"And is the woman anyone I know? Myself, for example?"

"Thou hast said."

"Then if it's only me the matter's easily settled. You say my reputation is not yet compromised, so no harm's done, and I will try to walk circumspectly and keep it uncompromised for the future. If you are nervous about your own I will be equally careful and not persecute



you. Next week I go down to Devonshire, then to Scotland, where we shall be together for a week at most, and then not back to town till November. Three whole blessed months, Cyril, you'll have a perfect rest, and needn't go to South Africa to escape me. Now be a good, dear boy and say you'll oblige Amy Gilfillan." She was moving towards the door as she spoke and Cyril could not help admiring the way in which her clinging gray dress and pale face, with its beautiful dark eyes, showed up against the oak book-cases behind her in the last lingering rays of the July sun. She was smiling provocatively, and it seemed to Cyril that he must speak now or forever hold his peace.

"Myra, don't go for a moment. Sit down, please, and hear what I've got to say. I'd rather leave it unsaid, but we've got to a point where in fairness to us both I must say it plainly and brutally." There was a note of distress in his voice which surprised her, and she went back to her chair and sat down, resting her head on her hand and looking intently and perplexedly at this new Cyril who had gone so pale and struggled with so much difficulty to get his words out.

"What's the matter, Cyril dear?" she asked gently. "You're worried about something. Tell me what it is and see if I can help you."

"I am afraid it may hurt you, Myra, but I only want you to hear me to the finish and believe I am too fond of you to speak like this if it were not to save us from the folly and the



tragedy I've spoken of. I told you I was going to South Africa, dear, and I said I was going to avoid you. It doesn't sound as polite as I could wish, but it has the merit of being true. We've seen too much of each other, Myra. We've danced together the evening through for the best part of the season, and we've been everywhere together too much for my peace of mind." He paused and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "Where's it going to end, dear? Of course your reputation is unharmed, even though well-disposed friends are talking and wondering, and if you weren't different from other people I wouldn't allow you to visit me in bachelor chambers without a chaperon. As it is, my affectionate uncle Everard called on me before he sailed for India to say I ought to bring things to an end one way or another, and Rodney lectured me two nights ago on the same topic. Well, so far no harm is done; we've both expressed ourselves freely and pointedly on the stupidity of public opinion, but we're at the parting of the ways. One road leads me to South Africa, the other brings us both to the brink of a tragedy."

Cyril paused and let his eyes wander from Myra's face to the window and back again. She did not yet see what was in his mind to say and could not help him.

"What is the tragedy, Cyril?" she asked. "What is the folly, and why is it driving you away?"

"The folly, Myra dear, is this, that I have



allowed myself to grow too fond of you. You are getting to mean too much to me and though I've tried more than once to avoid meeting you, as long as we are in the same country it will be impossible, and I am not sure that I could be answerable for my actions."

"You mean that you might ask me to marry you? That would be a distressing *bêtise* for you to commit." She spoke with a touch of irony in her voice. "And presumably I am to be too much overcome by surprise or gratitude to do anything but whisper a timid 'Yes.' That is the tragedy you wish to avoid? I think you are well advised in running away."

"Myra, don't make things unnecessarily hard for me by putting them in that way, don't pretend we're strangers; don't pretend it's outside the bounds of possibility that I should ask you to marry me and that you should accept me, but God help the girl I marry, and it's to save her that I'm speaking like this."

His voice had grown bitter in those last words as though he knew the reproof to which he was exposing himself and sought to discount it in advance. Myra did not reply for a while, and he looked up to receive her answer, but before speaking she crossed over and sat on the arm of his chair.

"I think you're right, Cyril," she said. "If I were *you* I think I should be doing the same thing. Yes, undoubtedly, if I were *you*." The emphasis of the repetition made him look up into her face.



“Meaning by that, Myra?” he asked.

“Meaning by that, that if I were in your place, only considering myself and constructing a little world in which everybody’s happiness were subjected to my own momentary whim, I should act as you are doing. If I were in your place and were someone quite different from you—Myra Woodbridge, for instance—I might look at it from another point of view, the point of view which is present to my mind now. Before I met you, Rodney Trelawney asked me to be his wife, and I told him to wait twenty-four hours while I thought it over. In the interval I met you. I’m not going to flatter you, Cyril dear, and say that I was fascinated all in a moment or anything of that kind, but you were quite different from any man I had met before, and I was attracted to you by contrast. You were always extraordinarily cold-blooded, Cyril, unattracted and self-possessed. You are still, and though you told me at Anstruther that it was all a pose, you have never become any nearer, never any less detached. I suppose one gets tired of being languished at, or perhaps one is only piqued by indifference. Why otherwise do men go on worshipping women who only notice them in order to trample them underfoot? Anyway, whether it was relief from adoration or a challenge to excite it, I accepted your indifference as a challenge and made up my mind to overcome it.” She laid her hand on his head and made him turn to look at her. “And I *have* overcome it, Cyril.



You said as much a moment ago, and though I haven't married Rodney, and you may say 'Time enough yet,' and 'No harm done,' the harm is done, and your going to South Africa comes too late in the day to be of much assistance to me."

There was a catch in her voice between laughter and tears as she ended. Her eyes were very bright and the violets in her bosom were trembling with the quickness of her breathing. In that moment she was living again the happy hours of that glorious season, lingering lovingly over each moment of time as it brought her a stage nearer to the present. Cyril trembled at her touch and hardly dared look up to the happy face above him. The sweet fragrance of the violets seemed to symbolize a spell which was stealing over him and numbing the hard resolution he had so painfully formed. His eyes under their long dark lashes wore an expression of trouble as he tore himself from the chair and stumbled to the window as though his reason were being drugged with the scent of the violets.

"Myra, darling," he said, "it won't do. Other people may marry and give in marriage, but I'm different from them. I don't want a wife, and other people do. I'm best and happiest alone. Hugo will marry because he's got all the instincts of a father; and Rodney will marry because he's incomplete and lonely without it; and Johnny will marry because he's like Beaudelaire, in search of a 'new thrill,' and marriage is an experience he



must taste on his way. Mortimer will marry: he wants sympathy and inspiration. But none of these things apply to me. Women play no part in my life beyond the hour's pleasure they give me when I have something pretty to look at and something bright and clever to talk to. You've known me three months, Myra, but I've known myself three-and-twenty years, and that's why I cannot marry and why you'll thank me for it later on. Before a man marries he must feel that his wife is indispensable to him and that he could not go on living without her. I don't feel that. I've always boasted of not being dependent on anyone for my happiness and I've grown to believe it. What the future may bring I'm not fool enough to prophesy, but my present feeling is that I was cut out for a lonely and selfish life and that not even you are an essential part of my happiness. If we married we should be in the seventh heaven for a time. It would be a pleasure for me to wait on you and inconvenience myself for you. But when the novelty wore off. . . . You know it *does* wear off, Myra, and most married people have an uncomfortable time of it when they've ceased to be bride and bridegroom and not learned to be husband and wife. The man's in the wrong. He sets a higher standard of devotion than he's able to keep up, and the first pain his wife suffers is when he begins to fall below it. It would be worse than usual in my case. I warn you that I couldn't answer for constancy of affection or even common politeness;



a day would likely come when I began to look on you as an interloper who had disturbed the orderly selfishness of my life. Myra, unless you make sacrifices to people you can't love them, and I've always been too selfish to sacrifice myself, with the result that, barring a near relation or two, there's not a soul in the world who might not die unwept and unsung as far as I'm concerned. I've not got a wide sympathy and I've not got any strong emotions. I'm the only person in the world I really care for, and I measure everything by the rule of my own convenience. Not a pleasant character, is it, Myra? but I'd better tell you now than let you marry me and discover it in an experience of neglect. It's been growing for twenty-three years, and you can't change that sort of thing in a moment. If ever you hear of me risking my life or my reputation or my household gods for the sake of a friend, you will know I've changed my skin and may make a successful thing of marriage. At present we're dealing with nothing but a temporary infatuation, and till the new day dawns, Myra darling, I'll ask you to comfort yourself with the reflection that even in the infatuation there was too much real affection to risk rubbing the bloom off you and leaving you to perish for want of care."

"The encrusted habits of twenty-three! They are not incurable, Cyril!"

"They are deep-seated and hard to shift. I admire your courage and optimism if you think you will have an easy job with them. It's navvy's



work, and I won't risk your little hands on the task."

"Now you're getting proud of your selfishness, Cyril, though I'm not sure that that isn't better than being morbid and penitent about it as you were a few minutes ago. Just tell me this: Do you really care for me at all at the present time?"

"So well that I'm afraid of deceiving myself into believing that it would last forever."

"Then if you care for me now, why not leave the future in my hands? Do you know, Cyril, half the wives in this world marry their husbands first and make them fall in love with them afterwards. Why won't you let me take my chance of winning your affection and keeping it? I don't want burnt-offerings and sacrifices, I only want the chance of making you love me and showing you in time that I *am* an indispensable part of your life."

"It's not good enough, Myra. I'm one of an evil generation that asks a sign, and one of those to whom no sign has been given. I don't think you know me as well as I know myself, and until I see evidence of a state of grace coming over me, I can't rely on your ability to make me change my skin."

She rose from the arm of the chair where she had been sitting and crossed to the window-seat where Cyril was standing.

"How many of the men you know have shown the sign, Cyril? Run through the husbands of your acquaintance and tell me how many of



them have sacrificed themselves for their wives, or their friends, or for humanity at large. Take the soldiers, the doctors, the statesmen, the lawyers, the philanthropists, and tell me how many of them are working and risking their lives for others, and how many are like Cyril Fitzroy, just thinking of themselves. The doctor's skill and patience and gentleness, his bedside manner, his willingness to face infection, all these have their price, they are assets in his balance sheet, things to be bought and sold. The soldier is fighting for glory, his own glory and a niche in the Temple of Fame. And even the philanthropist is a wolf in sheep's clothing, selling his charity to purchase consolation for an obese conscience." She surveyed him with an amused smile. "You have spent too much time in my company demolishing other people's claims to righteousness for me to attach any very great importance to sacrifices. I have pleasure in restoring to you certain pieces of bread which you have cast from time to time on the waters."

"You are an apt pupil, Myra, but quoting Scripture in support of your ends will not turn me from the first unselfish resolution I have ever made. If you knew me better you would not talk so lightly about taking the risk. I shall sail with Stretton on Friday."

"And what happens to Lady Violet for the next two years, or whatever time you're going to be away? Who will be her guardian?" It was a random shot, but at that moment it seemed to



Myra the only one that remained to her. She had wooed him away from his dejection and self-analysis by treating his apologies with banter, but he had now hardened himself again, and she was at a loss how to deal with his newly-born seriousness and resolution.

"We'll hope Darlington doesn't get the appointment. He told me last night nothing had yet been decided."

"But he expects it. He told me so at lunch to-day."

"Then—he must make what arrangements he can."

"And in the meantime you leave England for a couple of years. What then?"

"Then I shall probably come back and pick up the threads of the old life. You will have forgotten this summer and will be married to someone who deserves you better. We shall no longer be a danger to each other. And I shall grow like the rest of the old bachelors you see at the club, half my time thinking what I've eaten and the other half sketching out what I'm going to eat. Also, I shall tell all the young members that they ought to marry. That is the prerogative of old club bachelors. *Experto crede*—I have been a junior member."

"There is an alternative, Cyril."

"What is it?"

"You say you won't spoil my life by marrying me before you are in a state of grace, and that you haven't sufficient confidence in yourself to



stay in England for fear of the infatuation proving too strong for you. I am not of the generation that asks a sign, but if the sign be wanted I will wait two years for it to appear. You would be back in England in two years' time anyway, and I can keep the infatuation in check by refusing to marry you till then. If by that time you have proved to your own satisfaction that you are capable of sacrificing yourself and changing your skin, well, we're only the losers by two years. And if the skin doesn't change, well, you will have outgrown the infatuation, Cyril, and will be grateful to me for solving the problem in a way that keeps you an unembarrassed bachelor without having to take refuge outside the four-mile radius."

Before he had time to answer, a knock sounded at the door and one of Lord Darlington's footmen entered with a note. Cyril read it and handed it to Myra.

"MY DEAR CYRIL" (it ran):

"I have been privately informed this afternoon that I am to go to India. As you know, I cannot take Violet with me at her age and in the present state of unrest. A true word is often spoken in jest, and I told you I should call on you to act as her guardian. I now ask you seriously to undertake this. I propose setting up a dual control; Enid Sutherland has promised to act, and she will live with Violet. I want a man who will look after the finances of the trust, someone who



is personally acceptable to the child, likely to agree with Enid and able to advise her. Enid is a wise little woman, but she is still very young, and you know I have no relations on whom I could rely for one moment. I won't try to conceal from you that the trust is likely to be troublesome, as Violet has now arrived at the most critical period in her education. I shall, of course, make suitable provision for all three of you, but if you won't do it for Violet you won't do it for me or for any monetary consideration. If you are prepared to act, send word by messenger that you will call on me to-night before 11.30. If you won't act, don't bother to call.

“Yours,

“DARLINGTON.”

“Intensely business-like, Cyril, not a word wasted.”

“Is there any answer, sir?” asked the messenger.

Cyril looked at Myra before replying. The glance was returned without a quaver. There was no guidance there.

“Tell Lord Darlington,” he said, “that I am honored by his request, and will call on him to-night at eleven. That's all. Good-night.”

The door closed and Cyril walked thoughtfully to the bureau, selected a letter out of the pile, drew it from its envelope and destroyed it.

“My knowledge of engagement rings is limited, Myra,” he remarked; “durability would seem to be advisable, if one slender band of gold is to do duty for two long years.”



## CHAPTER XIII

### RESPONSIBILITIES OF OFFICE

"*Otium divos rogat in patenti  
Prensus Ægæo.*"—HORACE.

A FORTNIGHT after the evening on which Cyril had called on Lord Darlington to arrange the particulars of his trusteeship, Evelyn Fitzroy was sitting at breakfast in a cottage on the Surrey border of Hampshire. It was her temporary home while the house which her husband was building for her awaited completion. Through the open windows a rare view opened up to her: first, a frame of old English flowers, sweet-peas, larkspurs, snapdragons, hollyhocks, and Canterbury bells, swaying and spreading their sweetness with every breath of the warm gentle breeze of early morning; then a stretch of luxuriant summer grass falling away to meet the silver ribbon of water which rippled idly along the bottom of the valley. Her eyes wandered along the course of the stream to the point where it broke into three parts, running through the water-garden which was her peculiar pride and delight, and finally reuniting in a small lake at the extreme west end of the valley. Then as she raised her eyes from the cool mirror surface of the lake to



the rose-clad slopes which led terrace by terrace to the still unfinished house, she saw the figure of her husband descending the opposite side of the valley and crossing the causeway of her water-garden towards the cottage. In two minutes he had climbed the near side of the valley and had entered the cottage.

"Have the letters come yet?" he asked as he sat down.

"Yes, dear, but I don't think yours look very interesting. Here is a long and characteristic effusion from Cyril. You'd better read that first. He is motoring down to-day and expects to arrive shortly after lunch.

Lionel Fitzroy took the letter and began reading it. It was characteristic of his nephew.

"MY DEAR EVELYN" (it opened):

"If you wire in sufficient time you will be spared everything. Otherwise a carload of assorted men and maidens will descend on you after lunch to-day and disturb the well-earned repose which you hoped to find at Wateracre. Lunch will be taken on board by the way to diminish your embarrassment in some small degree, but we shall undoubtedly stay to tea, and though I am always moderate at that meal, I cannot answer for my party.

"Why am I doing this thing? For a dozen different reasons: primarily because I want to see you, secondarily because I want you to see me. *Ave atque vale*. All the pathos which those



words suggest to the mind are present in me at this moment. You are going to say good-bye to the nephew you have known and doubtless loved for three-and-twenty summers. His gay irresponsible cap and bells have been worn for the last time. Do you remember a remark of Oscar Wilde's about the number of young men who start life with quite a promising talent for exaggeration and then lose it all through contact with their sober seniors? That's me, me to the life. And Darlington's is the hand that has wrought this change. I told you a week ago about the trust he had established with me in charge. Incidentally polite society has not yet finished chuckling, but their hollow laughter leaves me unmoved. They do not see the tragedy of it; I do. My dear, I have taken to telling the truth; my ward makes it compulsory. How long her sense of filial duty will embarrass me in this way I cannot tell; but at present, when I see a large pair of absolutely confiding blue eyes fixed upon me, asking my advice and actually following it, I simply have to speak the horrid, obvious truth and do my best for the poor child. It reminds me of a terrible time I had in Monte Carlo three years ago. Ordinarily I loathe little boys like the plague. Little girls are different: they are dears, but that by the way. Well, a little boy came up to me in the hotel and put his hand in mine and said; 'Please, I want you to help me find father.' Father, being careless about trifles, had lost all his money, got his fare paid by the Casino back to England, and departed in an advanced



stage of intoxication. This and much more I knew and could have told my young friend, adding that father was no great catch after all, certainly not worth chasing over half Europe and running to ground in the heavily mortgaged ancestral mansion in mid-February with snow on the ground. However, I told him nothing. I took him by the hand, or rather he took me, and so we fared from the sunshine and the orange-trees back to mid-winter and—father. Poor child, he died last year of typhoid. No, you are wrong. The above is not half so irrelevant as in your heedless impatience you began to think. It just shows that when small helpless things with large wistful eyes put their hands in mine and tell me to do things, I just have to do them. That is what happened three years ago with Merlin, and that is what is happening now with Violet.

“Oh, I know it’s very flattering, but I am losing my noble manhood.

“Well, that’s the first reason. Then comes the all-important ward. You have not yet seen Violet. You shall see her to-day, and to-night you shall tell me in tones of proper humility that for every year of your life that you have *not* seen Violet, you have spent a wasted year. She’s like the Koh-i-Noor: there’s nothing like her in the whole world.

“Next point. Poor child, she’s still frightfully upset about her father going away, and I want you to comfort her. Evelyn dear, I’m a bit heavy in the hand for that sort of thing, but it’s



different with you. Later on I shall come to you and you shall give me good advice about her (and I will hand it on and get all the credit). At present she just wants somebody to mother her a bit.

“Turning now to less important things, the car will contain Enid Sutherland. Her you do not yet know, but, as I told you last week, she is my joint-guardian. Close upon the heels of the fair Enid comes Mortimer Forrest: him you know. Nominally he professes anxiety to see Lionel’s new house; in reality he wants to sit and look at Enid. When we are less busy we will have those two mated. They are unresisting, each hanging like a ripe peach over the open mouth of the other, if you can visualize how that is done. Which makes poor sport, like a bull-fight I watched at Granada, when one wily beast refused to fight and had to be flogged out of the arena. *Mais ce servira à passer le temps.*

“Finally comes the inimitable John Stanford. I fancy he pretends he wants to see your new rose-garden. But do not be flattered by his simulated interest; he only wants to talk to Violet. One of these days I will tell you why he joined the Samurai.

“You will probably not have read as far as this: in which case the loss is yours, but now the exigencies of paper compel me to end.

“With love to Lionel and yourself,

“I remain,

“Ever yours affectionately,

“CYRIL FITZROY.”



Lionel gave the letter back to his wife with a smile.

"The responsibilities of office do not seem to have impaired Cyril's volubility to any noticeable extent. You had better see if you can persuade them to stay to dinner, it ought to be very pleasant motoring back to town in the cool of the evening. Is Myra down yet?"

"She was out in the garden a moment ago. Here she is. Good morning, Myra. Did you sleep well?"

"Beautifully, thanks, Evelyn dear. Good morning, Lionel; I saw you early at work superintending the building."

"Yes, if I'd known what an exhausting day I had before me I should have lain in bed to get up strength. Cyril is bringing a personally conducted party down after lunch."

"So he told me. I met the postman down by the mill and he gave me a letter from Cyril saying he and Violet and a few more were coming down. You've not met Violet yet, have you Evelyn?"

"Not yet. Is she all that Cyril says she is?"

"Oh, all and more; one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen, and she worships Cyril in a way that would be embarrassing to anyone less sublimely unconscious."

"Cyril, like all the men of the Fitzroys, takes a certain amount of adoration as his due," remarked Evelyn, with a smile in the direction of her husband.



"It may be so," said Lionel, "but I think with Cyril it is largely insensibility. He sets his face against squandering any affection or consideration on others; and would be the last person to expect other people to lavish affection on him. It is part of his creed of self-centered detachment."

"A creed which is breaking down rather more rapidly than most," commented Myra. "I am only surprised at its having lasted so long."

Evelyn's mind went back to the conversation she had had with Myra in Pont Street earlier in the summer.

"What is breaking it down, Myra?"

"Perhaps he finds it inconsistent with his position as guardian; perhaps he is trying to rise to the heights where Violet has placed him; perhaps some one else has shed an influence over him. Who knows?"

Evelyn perceived that Myra was not minded to add anything to what she had said in Pont Street. There was, of course, nothing to identify Cyril with the man she had announced her intention of seeking out and compelling to love her, the "luckless victim" or "reluctant lover," as they had agreed to call him; but it was undeniable that Myra and Cyril had met much; and were corresponding freely, and Evelyn determined to watch the manner of their meeting that day to see whether it offered anything to strengthen her suspicions or to sweep them away as ill-founded.

It was nearly three o'clock before the car was heard running slowly through the winding drive



from the mill to the cottage. Cyril was driving with Lady Violet by his side and the other three passengers distributed in the body of the car. They came to a standstill by the cottage door and Cyril helped Lady Violet to alight. Evelyn Fitzroy rose from the big garden chair in which she was reclining and came forward to greet them.

"I have apologized already, Evelyn, for this descent in force; I will now make the necessary introductions and then we shall all be more at peace. This is Lady Violet Anstruther, my ward: Violet, my aunt Evelyn. Evelyn, Mrs. Sutherland my fellow-guardian: Enid, my aunt. Johnny and Morty you already know—probably to your cost."

"Now, would you like tea now or would you prefer to cool in the garden first and have tea later?" asked Mrs. Fitzroy.

"Tea later, Evelyn, say I, speaking for my party. We had lunch only an hour ago. I would suggest your sending Lionel over to the new house to explain its wonders to those who have not seen it before, while you and I sit on the lawn and discuss them in their absence."

No objection was made to this proposal, and the entire party, with the exception of Evelyn and Cyril, set out in the direction of the water-garden. Myra was seated at the far side of the valley when the car drove up and now moved down the path by the stream's edge to meet them.

"Take care of the child, Johnny," called Cyril



as John Stanford and Lady Violet walked away together.

Johnny turned round to make retort.

"Cyril, there was once a hen with one chicken."

"You are evidently a student of nature," said Cyril; "go on with your story, I am all attention."

"It isn't a story."

"What is it, a statistic, a piece of farmyard realism or merely a poem in prose?"

"It is a parallel." He disappeared down the side of the hill.

"And that," said Cyril, turning to his aunt, "is the reward I get for trying to do my duty conscientiously. Well, Evelyn, do you approve of my choice in wards?"

"Quite unreservedly, Cyril. She is like a little fairy, and I want you to tell me all about her and about your new position."

"I don't know that there's very much to tell. I have known her for a year or two now and we get on perfectly together, so well indeed that her father, who strongly disapproves of my character, opinions, and way of life, has not had the heart to break up so idyllic a friendship, and has even gone to the point of making me joint-guardian during his absence in India. Enid is going to give up the cottage near Oxford, where she has been living, and is going to settle down in Charles Street with Violet. About time, too. Do you know, that poor child has been living quite alone with her father ever since her mother died, twelve



years ago? Not a soul to talk to her and comfort her and help her out of her little troubles, except on those comparatively rare occasions when I called and took her in hand, and all the time regarded by her father merely as an instrument to secure salvation on a large scale, which means presiding over dull dinner-parties and growing up without even appreciating the beauties of childhood."

"How old is she?"

"Nearly sixteen."

"She looks more. And so you are going to restore her youth?"

"Yes, with the aid of Enid Sutherland. Enid takes charge of the home department, I look after the treasury, and at frequent intervals we hold cabinet councils to decide the policy to be adopted *in re* our ward."

"And who is this Mrs. Sutherland?"

"An old friend of mine and of Lord Darlington's. She *was* a Miss Dashwood; then she married Rawdon Sutherland and very properly divorced him. That was last year; I expect you remember the case. She is now just Enid Sutherland, age twenty-three, height five foot six, and passing fair. She *will* be, if I read the signs aright——" He paused.

"Mrs. Cyril Fitzroy?"

"Oh, dear me, no! Enid knows me far too well to take such a risk. I fancy we shall both live to see her as Mrs. Mortimer Forrest. Either that or Mrs. Rodney Trelawney; but I put my money on the first choice."



"Why do you suggest Rodney?"

"Because of the marked attentions he has been paying her in Oxford, particularly during Commem. week; but I think it is only one of his usual fortnightly infatuations, and I am sure Enid is not allowing her young heart to get into a flutter over him. He was to her the idle amusement of a summer day and she was to him a *pis aller* after a more serious entanglement in London at the beginning of the season. No, we had better keep Enid for Morty."

"And leave Rodney free for Myra Woodbridge?"

"If she wants him, yes."

"And what of yourself?"

"Oh, leave me out of the reckoning. Are not my hands sufficiently full with my guardianship? Your duty, Evelyn, is to smooth the path for Morty and Enid. Morty reproduces other people's catchwords with the accuracy of a gramophone; it is almost uncanny to hear the stream of Darlingtonisms which falls from his lips, and to know that all the time Darlington is speeding away to the other side of the world. Morty is anxious to get married, because a man of six-and-twenty who remains unmarried tends to think too much of the way his cutlet is cooked and whether Hollandaise or butter sauce goes better with asparagus; because he owes it to the state to rear a healthy family sound in body and mind, instead of leaving the future of the race in the hands of the ill-nourished and uneducated. Morty



fancies that Enid will give him the stimulus and sympathy without which, he assures me, man can do no work of lasting value. Enid is to soothe his artistic sense by playing a violin obligato to his spirited pianoforte rendering of Beethoven; she is to encourage and applaud his philanthropic work in the East End; she is to go out into society with him when her lord is socially inclined; she is to enjoy by his side the elaborate ritual of the Anglo-Catholic Church, and when he is tired with the effort of coping with an imaginary practice, she is to warm his slippers, listen to his *obiter dicta* on Order Fourteen, and discuss the probable candidates for the last vacant County Court judgeship."

"And what does Enid say to this programme?"

"She hasn't said much as yet, but she is going to marry him because she recognizes that he is a delightful person, whose only defect is to lack a sense of humor, and when she has married him she will teach him that all husbands start out by sketching a programme for their wives, and end up by wailing dismally through part of the programme which their wives sketch out for them." He stopped speaking as Morty himself came in sight, walking up the valley path with Myra Woodbridge. "We have as usual been discussing you, Morty," he remarked, going forward to greet Myra, "and have been agreeing on the improving effect which marriage will have on you."

"We can return the compliment, Cyril," said Myra. "Morty and I have been discussing the



improving effect which your guardianship is going to produce on you. Morty has been holding forth in the manner of an ancient Greek god."

"Anything less like a Greek god than our plump-faced, long-legged friend, I have seldom seen," murmured Cyril.

"When I say Greek god I mean Nemesis. Morty as Nemesis is most impressive."

"It is an impressive occasion." Mortimer had from force of habit drawn himself into an upright position in his chair, a pair of eye-glasses dangled from his right hand, while his left felt vainly for the table and papers which were not there. "This, Mrs. Fitzroy, is the material from which a Greek tragedy might be constructed, with Cyril as the protagonist. For three-and-twenty years he walks his presumptuous way, an offence in the eyes of gods and men, openly declaring that he cares for nobody, no, not he, and nobody cares for him. Then the hand of Nemesis is seen: our debonair egoist is driven to become guardian of a young and probably delicate girl. The nineteen hours a day which he previously devoted to thinking of himself he now consecrates to his charge. Good-bye to the apolaustic dinners, good-bye to the self-indulgent bachelor chambers, good-bye to the gilded saloons of Mayfair and the slender, dark-eyed sylphs who await him there. The next time he appears in a ballroom, it will be to lean yawning against a wall, chaperoning his ward and groaning for supper or bed. This is the way of the ungodly."



Cyril turned lazily in his chair.

"I *could* sketch Morty's later career for you, Evelyn, if I wanted to, but I sha'nt. It is probably unpleasant and certainly uninteresting. Rather let me discuss my own affairs and break it to you that you will see very little of me for the next two years." He glanced at Myra as he spoke.

"What is going to happen to you?"

"We are going abroad, Enid and Violet and I, the world before us, Providence our guide and education our object."

"When do you start, and where do you go?"

"We start in October and spend the winter in Syria and Egypt, the homes of western religion. We shall spend the spring in Greece and study the sources of western art; the summer will see us again in England. The following autumn we familiarize ourselves with the headwaters of western law and civilization in Italy, spend a short time observing modern Israel in his cosmopolitan surroundings on the Riviera, and after a brief spell in the musical centers of Germany and Belgium, we bring the finished article back to England."

"Two years crowded with incident," remarked Morty. "Why not have a look at Moorish remains in Spain, the homes of the Norsemen, and modern pork-packing developments in Chicago—U. S. A.?"

"Time forbids, Morty. We must be home in two years' time." Again Cyril glanced at Myra and caught her eye.



"Why two years?" asked Evelyn.

"Violet will be rising eighteen and will have to 'come out,' for one reason. For another, I am not sure that London society could stand the loss of three such ornaments as Enid, Violet, and myself for more than two years."

"And what happens then?" asked Mortimer. "Is the guardianship over? When does Darlington return from India?"

"I don't expect to see Darlington home for five years. The trust comes to an end when he returns, or when Violet comes of age or marries. No, when we get back to England after our travels, I shall turn to, with Evelyn's tried and valued assistance, and find a suitable husband for Violet. To save future unpleasantness, Morty, I may tell you that you will not be regarded as eligible."

"And when you have found a husband for Violet," said Myra, "you will have to find another for Enid."

"That is done already," remarked Cyril vaguely.

"And when you have found a husband for Enid," said Evelyn, "and have robbed all mere female matchmakers of a livelihood, you will be free to settle down to that life of cultured detachment which is now being so rudely interrupted?"

"No, I fancy example will have proved contagious. I shall then select a suitable bride for myself. Is it raining, Morty?"

The sky had become overcast while they talked and the first large drops of a summer storm were falling. Morty picked up his deck-chair and moved towards the house.



“Moisture is falling,” he remarked, “but it is not rain. Rather it is the tears of the angels on hearing that Cyril Fitzroy proposes to get married.”

He led the way indoors, while Cyril and Myra, taking opposite ends of the garden-couch on which she and Evelyn had been sitting, prepared to follow in silence.



## CHAPTER XIV

### PROVIDENCE GETS TO WORK A SECOND TIME

*"Redintegratio amoris."*

A WEEK had slipped away since Cyril's visit to his aunt at Wateracre and Evelyn Fitzroy awoke one day to the fact that time was passing and she had made less than no progress in the direction of bending Myra Woodbridge's obstinate young will to do her bidding. She spent some time thinking of her next move, and then decided that with Myra it was useless to be subtle, but paying to be bold; and the result of her decision materialized in a dinner party sufficiently small to make a meeting between Rodney and Myra inevitable, but large enough to keep it comparatively inconspicuous. Her irresponsible nephew she did not invite; whether Myra had him in mind, or had seriously taken the aggressive, were points on which Evelyn still lacked reliable information, but she knew sufficient of Myra's natural perversity to remove any object of interest which might rival Rodney in a claim on her attention. Her final precaution was to invite Myra a few minutes before the other guests, in order to prepare her for the people she was to meet.



At a few minutes after eight Myra swam into the drawing-room, arrayed in the barbaric colors which she inclined to favor, a green transparent silk skirt hanging to her knees over a russet brown dress.

"Well, Evelyn, I have done your bidding and come early and now I expect to be rewarded with some confidences which you considered too sacred to divulge in presence of your other guests."

Evelyn laughed softly.

"Clever child, Myra. I wanted to tell you who is going to be here to-night and how you have got to behave."

"Evelyn darling, that's rather a reflection on my deportment generally! I never thought you would find it necessary to warn me not to forget my manners in company."

"My dear, your manners are perfect, but your behavior is so irresponsible that you ought never to accept an invitation without inquiring who else has been invited, and then rehearsing yourself into a suitable frame of mind."

"That would be like your preposterous nephew Cyril. I went with him yesterday to call in Cadogan Square. He rang the bell and asked the footman if he was expected to dinner. The man said 'Yes.' 'Who else is coming?' asked Cyril. The man rolled off a string of names. 'Thank you, James,' said Cyril. 'I sha'n't be able to come to-night. Don't say I called,' and off he went. Abominably rude of him, I thought."

"Abominably. I wonder anyone continues to



invite him out. But I suppose he went, after all?"

"Oh, dear me, no! Telephoned to make an improbable excuse and then took me to the theatre. We had a delightful evening together."

"And now you are sitting in judgment on him! You and he have a demoralizing effect on each other. That is why I've not asked him here to-night."

"Oh, Evelyn, how unfair! I am the one steadying influence in his life; I looked forward to meeting him to-night in order to continue his moral elevation. Whom have you got in his place? I am feeling filled with good influence for young men and I want a lamb for the slaughter."

"Rodney is coming—for one."

Myra allowed herself time to take in this announcement in its entirety, then said very quietly:

"Why did you do that, Evelyn? Knowing what you do about us, wasn't that rather tactless? It will make things very difficult for us both."

"My dear, Rodney is hardly likely to repeat his request to you to-night, so there is no need to be embarrassed. He won't even take you in to dinner, and if he talks to you I only ask that you treat him with common civility. I'm going away again to-morrow and this is my last opportunity of having you both to dinner, so I hope you won't spoil my party by any absurd demonstrations."



"My dear Evelyn, I should never do that, but I wish you hadn't done it so soon after—after what happened."

"There's method in my tactlessness, as you think it. You and Rodney have been busily avoiding each other for a month past. Well, whether you ever change your mind towards him is a matter beyond my control, but I can and will do my poor best to keep you from drifting into a condition of armed neutrality. All I want you to do is to show Rodney that you are still willing to be friends with him, and after that I leave you to work out your own salvation."

Myra sighed.

"I'll do my best, Evelyn, but I can't help thinking that you are making a mistake."

The drawing-room door opened and admitted a large proportion of the evening's guests: John Stanford, corpulent but immaculate; George Fair, bristling with that armory of exclusive stop-press information which always encircles a journalist; and finally Mortimer Forrest, careworn and wistfully conscious of the world's wickedness and the responsibilities it brought him as an Old Bailey barrister thriving on a case a month and wishing he could overcome his regrettable appearance of juvenility. The introductions were hardly over when Lady Violet Anstruther was announced, and walked into the room followed by the tall, graceful figure of Mrs. Fitzroy's cousin Margaret Cardew. Then for the last time the door opened to admit Rodney Trelawney, slightly apologetic



for being late, but unashamedly satisfied with his personal appearance and the outward circumstances of life in general.

Mrs. Fitzroy greeted him affectionately and prepared to divide up her guests for their progress to the dining-room.

"Mr. Fair, will you take in Miss Woodbridge? Mr. Stanford, Lady Violet? Mr. Forrest, will you take Margaret; and Rodney, will you bring up the rear with me?"

The width of the table separated Myra from Rodney, and Mrs. Fitzroy at the head was in a commanding position to ride the wind and control the whirlwind if it should be necessary. Rodney had evidently been surprised and put out of countenance at finding himself in the same room as Myra, and as hostess she felt the necessity of plunging into conversation before he had time to grow self-conscious.

"Well, Rodney, I've not seen you since you damaged your knee, but as you have no difficulty in walking with your old easy grace, I suppose I may conclude that you are recovered?"

"Oh, I'm quite all right again now, Mrs. Fitzroy, thanks. I had to lie up for a week, but I was well looked after, and now I've made a complete recovery."

"I was sorry to hear about it on my own account as well as yours, as I should have held you to your promise to invite me up for Commem. if you had been in a fit condition."

Rodney made no reply and merely looked un-



comfortable. His discomfort was not relieved when George Fair broke in with:

"Weren't you able to go to Commem., Trelawney? House ball, too? That was very bad luck."

"As a matter of fact," stammered Rodney, "I did go to the ball—at the last moment, you know. There wasn't time to let you know, Mrs. Fitzroy."

"Oh, Rodney!" Mrs. Fitzroy's voice was filled with simulated pain and grief. "The accident happened weeks ago, you had to lie up only one week, and a whole blessed fortnight was not long enough to let me know! My faith in you is gone."

"These petty deceptions, Rodney, are not only useless, they are inartistic." John Stanford warmed to the genial work of involving him in further commitments. "The fact is, Mrs. Fitzroy, Rodney didn't want you to know who went with him."

"My dear Johnny, there's absolutely nothing about that ball which I mind telling Mrs. Fitzroy."

"Telling—yes! with no eye-witnesses to contradict you. Seeing—no! You can't brazen things out in the same way if you fabricate your story under the accusing eye of someone who was on the spot at the time."

"Well, Rodney," said Mrs. Fitzroy, "who went with you?"

"My mother," answered Rodney, with a piteous attempt to gain credence for his reply.

"But who else was there?"



"Oh, a crowd of people, *tout le monde*."

"*Tout le demi-monde*," murmured George Fair.

"I fear so," rejoined Mrs. Fitzroy, nodding to him, "or else there would be less mystery about it."

"There seem to have been all the elements of a thoroughly disreputable evening," remarked John Stanford to the world at large. "In anyone else it would not surprise me so much, but Rodney—*quis custodiet* now?"

Rodney's sensitive cheek revealed a betraying flush.

"I repeat that nothing happened that I would mind repeating to Mrs. Fitzroy. Of course, in the presence of a man like Johnny, whose pruriency of mind is revealed in almost every word he speaks, one is inclined to greater reticence."

"Now he's abusing the plaintiff's attorney, Mrs. Fitzroy," commented Morty Forrest. "He shows every evidence of guilt."

"Well, never mind, Rodney, you shall tell me all about it later on, when we're by ourselves. The great thing is, did you enjoy yourself? Nothing else matters."

"What an immoral doctrine, Mrs. Fitzroy! But I did enjoy myself; it was—bar none—the best evening of my life."

John Stanford shook his head sadly.

"From our present knowledge of Rodney's character we have, alas! no grounds for divorcing enjoyment from disreputability. Did you go with a party, Rodney, or wander in by yourself,



seeking whom you might devour? I exclude your mother, who doubtless tried unavailingly to moderate your newly developed trend of immorality."

"I went with a party of sorts."

"'Of sorts'—that much we gladly concede. A party of one, I imagine?"

"Mrs. Fitzroy, do you allow your guests to be hectored and insulted in the way Johnny is hectoring and insulting me now?"

"Candidly, yes," said Evelyn, with a laugh, "if it provides good sport for the onlookers. But we'll change the subject and leave the mysterious charmer's name undiscovered for the present. Rodney has one joy in life greater than committing an indiscretion, and that is, having it talked about. Did you go to any other balls?"

"No, only that one."

"Why didn't you go to the Balliol ball?" asked Mortimer Forrest. "I'm told it was one of the best."

Rodney saw an opportunity of changing from attacked to attacker.

"My dear Morty, in heaven's name, why should I—why should any man go to Balliol, most of all when the Balliol man emerges from the decent obscurity of his primitive lair and indulges in scenes of dusky jubilation?"

Mortimer sighed heavily.

"Adam once told the Serpent that there was a black man at Balliol; it was untrue, but for some unaccountable reason he regarded it in the



light of a joke. Then Eve was told the story, and she told it again to the Serpent. The Serpent was a patient creature, but a day came when he could no longer stand that story and he invoked the assistance of the angel with the flaming sword to rid Eden of those two wearisome creatures. But the angel was tender-hearted and instead of killing them and their story with them, he turned them out of Eden with license to amuse their small minds with the black-man story. The world has been the sadder. I have said."

"My dear Morty"—Rodney's voice was full of sympathy—"I did not know you would take it to heart so much. I had almost forgotten that you were a Balliol man."

"Forgotten!" echoed John Stanford. "Does not every Balliol man bear in his face the memories of those devastating years? They tell me, though I have never seen it, that one man is lynched every Sunday night in full term, *pour encourager les autres* and amuse the members of Trinity. Jowett started the Balliol concerts to drown the screams of dying agony."

The expression of weariness had deepened on Mortimer Forrest's face.

"I ask only one thing: that you refrain from the story of the Balliol missionary who owed his escape from the cauldron solely to the discovery by means of a hat riband that both diners and dinner derived their educational advantages from the same hospitable *alma mater*. I don't mind the story, but it belongs to Christ's, Cambridge."

Mrs. Fitzroy came to his rescue.



"Morty's air of quiet dignity is proof against the most offensive charges. You should imitate him, Rodney, so that the next time you have anything to conceal, your appearance will not be quite so transparent."

"But I have nothing to conceal, Mrs. Fitzroy. My manner is transparent because my life is blameless."

"Rodney can do no wrong! So your mother thinks. It is a strange delusion. Lady De-launay is the same with Myra, which is even stranger. Strangest of all is that Violet thinks my nephew Cyril is infallible, and in that case there is no tie of blood to prejudice her."

"You mustn't speak against my guardian, Mrs. Fitzroy, it will weaken my instinctive respect for him and make his task more difficult even than at present."

"I agree with the conclusion, but the premises strike me as unsound." With the disappearance of Commemoration as a topic of conversation, Rodney's manner had perceptibly brightened. "Your instinctive respect for your guardian, Lady Violet, is going to be undermined as it has never been undermined before. I see an unequaled opportunity for throwing aspersions on Cyril's character, and if I lose this chance of repaying him in generous measure for the insults he throws in my face and the slanders he circulates behind my back, I am confident that it will never return to me."

"Take care, Rodney," advised John Stanford,



"he probably knows more to your discredit than you know to his. The field of selection is so much wider."

"And remember, Trelawney," added George Fair, "that he has an uncanny knack of laying your most cherished secrets bare. What he doesn't know he makes up, but he usually knows. I shall go to him for information about this business of the House ball. I am proud to be honored with his friendship and to be able to throw him into the opposite scale when women claim a monopoly of scandal and tale-bearing."

John Stanford turned to his neighbor.

"I fancy your guardian's character is going to be spared, Lady Violet. We have terrorized Rodney and silenced him with the aid of his own guilty conscience. But to return to an earlier point. I believe I am right in saying that a trustee usually has powers to hand over the trust to another man, or, at any rate, to reinforce the number of trustees. I am hourly expecting Cyril to abdicate in my favor, or at least to associate me with him in the control of empire."

Lady Violet laughed.

"You wouldn't like it, Mr. Stanford; you would find it a very exacting task. Do you see this dress I'm wearing?"

"I do."

"Do you like it?"

"I think it's charming. It reflects credit on you in the choosing and the wearing."

"How nicely you said that! But you've missed



the moral—which is that I didn't choose it. I made my guardian see to that."

"He's got better taste than I thought."

"Since I took him in hand he's displaying all kinds of unsuspected virtues. But the choosing of the dress was nothing to the matching of the stockings. It's not a common shade of gray, and we spent the whole of yesterday afternoon and this morning trying to get a perfect match."

"And now Cyril has had a gruel supper and retired to an early bed to be ready for to-morrow's labors?"

"Oh, no. He drove down here with me and wanted to come and fetch me away, but I sent him home to deal with some letters connected with the Anstruther Trust. Now do you want him to abdicate in your favor?"

John Stanford turned and looked her squarely in the face, wondering as he did so whether he had ever seen a more beautiful face; he was sure that he was looking into the softest eyes in the world.

"Quite honestly, Lady Violet, if I had the opportunity I would change places with him to-morrow. It would be a new sensation."

She treated him to a bow of mock solemnity.

"I will bear that in mind when I've finished my work of reformation. Poor Cyril, I am sure he would hate the idea if he ever regarded it in that light. While he fancies that he's busily engaged in my education and upbringing, he little knows that it's his own education that's being brought



about. He's a new man, already, after a fortnight's treatment; in two years he will be unrecognizable."

"And dreadfully dull, I am afraid, Lady Violet. What happens then?"

"Oh, then I hand him over to my father, a perfectly useful member of society and quite schooled to the idea that he exists for the good of the world instead of his present, or former, notion that the world exists solely for his good."

"I think it's misdirected energy, Lady Violet, and immoderately hard work at that."

"So hard that I dare not dissipate my strength in trying to put you to school with him; but I think the result will justify my labors, and anyway it's the first time my father has shown any evidence of a sense of humor, and I don't mean to discourage his first efforts."

The conversation had ceased to be general at the moment when Violet and John Stanford had retired from it, and until the end of the meal four different topics were under discussion by as many different couples. Mortimer Forrest and Miss Cardew compared notes on the Bayreuth Festival, with every semblance of satisfaction and enjoyment. Mrs. Fitzroy was trying to divine what change had come over Rodney since last she met him, on the occasion of his gloomy outburst against the unmarried don and all his works. Myra sat silent, in appearance listening with interest to the account of a minor war in the Balkans which George Fair had witnessed as



special correspondent, in reality thinking hard how to accede to Evelyn's request that she should bridge the gulf which had opened up between Rodney and herself.

No solution had presented itself by the time they adjourned to the drawing-room. The men had been granted permission to bring their cigars with them, and Myra felt embarrassed at being deprived of the few moments' solitude which she had mentally postulated in order to think out a suitable form of words for her difficult effort at rapprochement. She sought such solitude as the room afforded by retiring to the end farthest from the piano, and was settling herself for contemplation when a fresh source of embarrassment presented itself. At Mortimer Forrest's request Lady Violet had seated herself at the piano; Miss Cardew, on whom he had prevailed to sing, was discussing the accompaniment of Tosti's "Spring"; and as the remaining guests selected seats of comfort and vantage, she saw Rodney—every other position eliminated by the skilful tactics of Mrs. Fitzroy—advancing to the unoccupied chair at her side.

She welcomed him with a smile and they sat in silence until the end of the song. Margaret Cardew had a contralto voice of rare depth and charm, and Rodney surrendered himself heart and soul to the music, sitting with half-closed eyes and letting each thrilling note throb itself into the inmost recesses of his brain. Several minutes had elapsed after the song was over and the low



murmur of applause had subsided before he broke the spell to remark in a low voice:

"I would give five years of my life for Miss Cardew's voice."

Myra watched the singer idly turning over the music at the piano.

"I would give five years of my life for Miss Cardew's hair. You see the difference in our characters; you want the lasting, spiritual gift of song, but I only hanker after the fleeting vanities of external appearance."

"What is the matter with your own hair, Miss Woodbridge? I admit *I* stand in need of reinforcement, but that cannot be *your* reason for wanting a change."

"It's the quantity I envy, and the color, though I should have to have her complexion to go with it. But why have I been degraded to 'Miss Woodbridge,' Rodney?"

He shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"Surely that question is unnecessary, and surely it bears on rather an embarrassing topic."

"Then I apologize for my gaucherie in putting it, and still more—in all humility of spirit—for my stupidity in finding it necessary."

"Miss Woodbridge, are you serious?"

"I was never more so."

"Then you will excuse me for saying that it shows some little want of delicacy, or any way of perception, to think that our relations could continue unchanged by a certain speech I made to you and a certain letter you sent me in reply."



He spoke with considerable coldness, and the softness of Myra's voice in answer made a noticeable contrast.

"I never imagined, Rodney, that our relations would be unchanged, but I did think, and I still think, that it was possible for me to write that letter and for our friendship to be unbroken by it."

"Then I think you misunderstand human nature, Miss Woodbridge, you certainly misunderstand male nature. I can be friends with people I could never contemplate marrying, whether because they don't attract me in that way, or because, like Mrs. Fitzroy, they are already married. And I imagine I could be friends—and nothing more—with people who are marriageable from every point of view. That is rather more doubtful; at the base of every friendship between man and woman lies primitive sexual attraction, or in more polite language—the ultimate possibility of marriage. It may never play a prominent part, but it's there all the time. However, that is a digression. The point I want to emphasize is that friendship ceases to be possible when a man is so conscious of a woman's—what shall I call it?—marriageability that he asks her to be his wife and she tells him she will do nothing of the sort—or, to be accurate, 'that at present she doesn't feel . . . ' and so forth."

"You say it is impossible, but you don't say why, and I want enlightenment on the man's point of view."



"Well, it's largely the man's fault. He can't reconcile himself at first to the idea that from the point of view of marriage he is utterly ineligible in that particular quarter, and when he is reconciled, he can't accustom himself to the new and somewhat tame-cat position of Platonic Friend. Possibly it is mere pride, and possibly the pride is entirely wrong-headed, but mere man does not find it easy to forget the humiliation of having his suit rejected."

"No, he does not, and it is the greatest and most disastrous mistake of his life. If the Astronomer Royal died to-morrow and you offered yourself for his position, would you be humiliated by rejection? And if the Astronomer Royal offered himself for your Boden professorship of Sanscrit, would he be humiliated if some one else were appointed? In the first instance it would be no reflection on your Greek scholarship, and in the second no reflection on his mathematics. The rejection would be based purely on your unsuitability for a particular position and would imply no unsuitability in general."

"I cannot apply the same reasoning to the relations between man and woman, Myra."

"But why not?"

Rodney laughed and Myra noted the hopeful sign.

"Because of man's natural vanity; he fancies that he is eligible for every woman he meets. He cannot recognize his limitations until they are forcibly pointed out to him, and then he is unreasonably aggrieved."



"And am I—is any girl to be deprived of a man's friendship because she refuses to marry him? My dear Rodney, it is unthinkable! Compare the countless hordes of the ineligible with the almost invisible band of those who might some day seem suitable! You are condemning a girl to a very lonely life."

"Oh, no. I think you miss my point. It is possible for you to be friends with any number of men who from the point of view of marriage could not be seriously contemplated for two minutes on end. The thing is, that they don't know it; they still regard themselves as hot favorites, or at any rate in the running. They have never had their limitations pointed out and their fools' paradise is still undisturbed. But with me it's different; you have definitely and unmistakably put me outside the pale, and you must not wonder, Myra, if I allow myself to be influenced by my pride."

"I don't wonder at it, Rodney, though I deplore it as an unwise and irrational human weakness. What I do wonder at is the method you employ of preserving your dignity."

"I don't quite follow you."

"Well, if it's a humiliation to have your suit rejected, I imagine you wish to keep the world from prying into your secret."

"That goes without saying."

"Very well. The world sees a man and girl together, frequently and intimately; it may speculate and prophesy, being a meddling, in-



quisitive world. Then it sees the man moving heaven and earth to avoid meeting the girl, hardly speaking on those rare, uncomfortable occasions when they are forced into a corner together, and even going the length of jumping out of a train and taking another back to town to avoid being under the same roof with her. It's all right, Cyril respected your confidence, and I found that out from another source. Well, Rodney, what interpretation does the world put on this sudden and dramatic estrangement?"

She allowed him full time for the moral to sink in, and after a pause added: "There is only one interpretation, and the world is very busy making it public."

"You are right, Myra, perfectly right up to a point, and I bow to your superior wisdom. I admit it was foolish to allow the world to be a spectator of a sudden rupture; I ought to have maintained the appearance of our relations having undergone no change. But you have not made out a case for anything more; you have not shaken my idea of the impossibility of our ever again being more than casual acquaintances."

Myra laughed and stood up preparatory to joining the rest of the party at the other end of the room, and Rodney rose and stood in front of her.

"No, I have not made out my case there, because I have only been appealing to your reason, and people are seldom kind or generous from rational motives. Now I am going to appeal to



something else. I don't quite know what. I can't afford to lose a friend because he doesn't get just what he asks for." She placed her hands on his shoulders and looked into his eyes. "And I can't afford to lose your friendship, Rodney. You have paid me the highest compliment a man can pay a woman."

His resolution quailed under the steady gaze of her dark eyes, but he made a despairing effort.

"It won't do, Myra. I beg your pardon, 'Miss Woodbridge.' You are asking an impossibility."

"I prefer 'Myra,' and so do you. You've been betrayed into it four times through force of ancient habit."

"Then if force of ancient habit brings me back as a friend, force of ancient habit will bring me back as a friend on the old terms, friendship brightened by a certain hope."

There was a shade of distress in her voice as she answered.

"I can hold out no hope, Rodney; I want your friendship on a new basis without any thought for the future."

"But that's just what I can't give you, Myra. I drink to the establishment of peace, but it is a peace of my own making, and I reserve to myself the right of cherishing what hopes I like, even the most foolish hope of all—that you may some day repent of writing me the letter you did."

Later in the evening Rodney left Pont Street in a condition of inward elation which was intensi-



fied rather than diminished as he walked home. He whistled shrilly and emotionally for the length of Knightsbridge and Piccadilly, walking bare-headed and swinging his opera hat in his hand. His spirits were still unsubdued when he reached the Temple, and he climbed the stairs to Cyril's rooms to the strains of the "Rosary," sung with a cheerfulness quite alien to the *motif* of that song.

Cyril was sitting in pajamas and a pink silk kimono at one end of his dining-room table. He was surrounded by papers, and in front of him stood an abnormally large deed-box marked with the words "Anstruther Trust." On his knees and covering the whole of his lap lay a black cat sleeping and declining to be disturbed by the movement of his pen. At the other end of the table sat his brother—Hugo—busily engaged with blue draft and a handful of chalks in subjecting some of the more notable incidents in Cyril's eventful life to artistic treatment. The sketches covered one-half of the table, and the output was to all appearances inexhaustible. The artist was engaged on a fresh study when Rodney burst into the room and sank into the largest armchair.

"You seem pleased with yourself, Rodney," remarked Cyril, "possibly intoxicated. Who was she?"

"Who was what?"

"Who was the fair young thing who smiled and looked softly at you, thereby reducing you to your present noisy incoherence?"

"My dear boy, you tire me."



"Rodney's getting secretive," remarked Hugo Fitzroy; "time was when he blazoned his indiscretions forth almost before they were committed. Now it sometimes takes as long as ten minutes to find out what he's been doing."

"You find out, though, just the same. Give him time and he'll weary your ears with her charms." Cyril retired from the discussion and went on writing.

"A more gloomy couple I've never seen," said Rodney. "Put down your pen and talk, Cyril, instead of making a will and bequeathing things you don't possess to people who don't want to receive them."

"My dear Rodney, the greatest folly in the world is to insure your life, because you get nothing out of it; and if you're a bachelor like me, there's nobody standing to gain by your death. The next greatest folly is to make a will. What do I care what happens to my goods when I'm occupying a neat but inexpensive ash tray at Brookwood?"

"But think what a mess your things will get into, with Hugo taking your *editions de luxe* and illustrating them in the margin on principles peculiarly his own. You will forsake your warm corner to prevent the sacrilege."

"When I die, Rodney, I go out like a candle. There is an air of finality about it, and I discourage all idea of shilly-shallying with this world and its works. He may do what he likes with my books—assuming he's my heir-at-law—which he's not."



Hugo yawned.

"This is a melancholy and unprofitable discussion, only justified by its success in quelling the aggressively high spirits which Rodney displayed on entering your room. Having achieved its purpose, let us dismiss it and discuss Rodney's private life—in its double aspect."

"Which particular double aspect is this?" inquired Rodney.

"I refer to the duplicity, or double dealing, which enables you to philander in London at a time when a girlish heart is beating for you in the neighborhood of Oxford."

Rodney flushed.

"This is a most unnecessary and offensive charge, Hugo, which I must ask you to substantiate or withdraw."

"Are you prepared to deny the existence of girlish hearts in the neighborhood of Oxford, or to say that they don't beat for you? Think carefully of the sylphs who flock to your lectures on Catullus."

"I honestly don't know what you're driving at."

"Put him out of his misery, Hugo," interjected Cyril. "We won't vouch for the heart-beats, but there's a girlish hand wasting its time in writing you letters, one of which numerous series lies awaiting you on the corner of the mantelpiece." Rodney walked over to fetch it, and as he opened the envelope, Cyril upbraided him in a gently drawling voice. "I call it an abuse of hospitality,



Rodney, to divulge the fact that you are staying with me. These chambers are sacred to me and Endymion my cat. I allow Hugo to breakfast with me as the result of an amicable compromise by which I get down half an hour before him, select the best eggs, and fortify myself with tea and a pipe in case he should prove irritable or argumentative. Occasionally a friend is privileged to use my spare room, as you are now doing, but I did not think it necessary to hint that these chaste rooms were not to be turned into the painted background for your young romances."

Rodney read the letter without paying the slightest attention to Cyril's remarks. It was short, but in the moment of its arrival peculiarly embarrassing.

"DEAR MR. TRELAWNEY" (it ran):

"If you have not by this time forgotten me and the promise you made at Commem. to read the MS. of my first six chapters, I hope to hold you to your word. The later part of the book is being rather recast in form, but the six chapters in question have received what I hope is their final revision, and I should greatly like your opinion of them. Can you come and dine here—Ladies' Union Club, Dover Street—on Friday next at eight o'clock, when I will give you the MS. I do hope you are disengaged that night, as it is my only free evening before I go abroad.

"Sincerely yours,

"ENID SUTHERLAND."



Rodney walked the length of the room and back, lost in thought; then he tore the letter and envelope into small pieces, threw them into the grate, and turned to face his host.

"What are you doing next Friday night, Cyril?"

"What are you avoiding next Friday night, Rodney?"

"Never mind that, but answer my question."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Oh—dine with me somewhere and go on to a theatre."

"One or other, Rodney, but not both. If one goes to the theatre one has a species of hurried high tea. If one dines—well—one dines."

"Well—make it what you like. Will you come?"

"Yes, by all means, if you can give me satisfactory answers respecting the quality and locale of the dinner."

"You shall make your own choice."

"Then my last objection is overridden."

"You'll come too, Hugo?"

"My dear Rodney, why this fretful itch for hospitality? I will come provided Cyril only orders dinner for himself and you, and does not try to cater for my unusual palate; but do let us know what you're trying to avoid. Explain this nameless terror which follows you from Oxford and runs you to earth in the Temple."

"My dear boy, I only want an engagement that night, and if I can't be previously engaged—I must do the next best thing. You and Cyril



figure as the next best thing in the evening's programme. Where do you keep ink and paper and so forth, Cyril?"

"In my bureau, top right-hand pigeon-hole."

Rodney sat himself down and wrote a short note.

"DEAR MRS. SUTHERLAND:

"I regret to say I have promised to give dinner on Friday next to two men, one of them my present host. I am so sorry not to be able to accept your most kind invitation.

"Yours sincerely,

"RODNEY TRELAWNEY."

There for the moment the matter ended, with the affixing of a penny stamp. In the morning he asked Cyril whether the letter had been posted. Cyril replied that he had gone out shortly after midnight and posted it with his own. Was anything amiss? Rodney hesitated, and then said No. It did not matter now, but on reflection he had thought of destroying the letter and sending another in its place.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE MELLOWING INFLUENCE OF TIME

"Labuntur anni."—HORACE.

TOWARDS the end of October Cyril, Enid and Violet left England for the Holy Land. Cyril had given a farewell dinner the night before leaving London in order to reduce the number of those who might feel constrained to see the last of him, and when the train steamed out of Charing Cross next morning, the final shaking of hands and waving of handkerchiefs were carried out only by Myra, Mortimer Forrest and John Stanford.

"And now," said Johnny, as they turned away and walked back along the platform, "I suppose we can adapt the memorable phrase of William Pitt the Younger and roll up the map of England, as it won't be wanted for the next six months. Cyril didn't seem particularly cut up at the prospect of going away."

"That's hardly to be wondered at," commented Mortimer, "there's little enough to keep him in England. No doubt he is leaving one or two aching hearts behind, but I scarcely imagine that his own heart would pay them the compliment of aching in return."



“And I’m not sure that he’d show it in any case,” said Myra. “Cyril can hardly be regarded as demonstrative.” She was thinking of their Platonic parting and his strictly non-committal words and manner of farewell.

For six months the wanderers were lost to the eyes of their friends in England. A plentiful crop of letters indicated the course of their travels through Palestine, Egypt, Turkey, and the Morea, and showed that under Cyril’s guidance it was possible to combine much pleasure with instruction.

Enid Sutherland for reasons of her own wrote only to Mortimer Forrest, Lady Violet divided her attentions between Myra and John Stanford, and Cyril readily supplied the deficiencies of his companions. Polysyllabic and many-paged, exuberant in spirit and ornate in diction, his formidable budget scattered itself each mail over the breakfast tables of Mrs. Fitzroy, Hugo, Rodney, Myra and others. From time to time the letters were passed from hand to hand, and the brains of all the readers were thrown into common stock to extract and agree upon some basis of truth in the highly colored narrative. In the circulation of letters, Mortimer Forrest played no part, and Mrs. Fitzroy, remembering Cyril’s determination to hunt Enid and Morty to the altar, drew her own conclusions, and applauded her nephew’s sagacity and success. There was nothing in Violet’s letters to John Stanford which did not admit of publication, though he complained jest-



ingly that Cyril was abusing his position as guardian to acquire an undue influence over his ward's mind.

"Cyril this and Cyril that!" he exclaimed to Myra. "I can see the whole picture: Cyril striding from Damascus to Athens, pouring forth a flood of learning with appropriate topographical quotations from Byron, and Violet humbly following at his heels, wondering whether the whole world has ever contained Cyril's equal, wondering too what she has done to deserve such a guide."

"Instead of reading it all for herself in Murray's Handbook," suggested Myra.

"Where all the quotations from Byron have already been set out in their proper places. However, it can't last forever. Cyril will find the novelty of being useful to others wearing off very quickly. I am only surprised that he has been able to keep away from his flesh-pots so long."

"Violet is a strong counter-attraction."

"True, but I have never known a counter-attraction last so long. A year or two ago Cyril was very intimate with some girl. I've forgotten her name, but he used to be seen everywhere with her, dinners, theatres, dances—quite a promising affair. Then all of a sudden the intimacy came to an end, and when I spoke to him about it he assured me that there had been no rupture, and that she had served her purpose, which was to tide him over the month of March, 'always a difficult month,' said Cyril, 'so many people out of England, Lent and March winds,



and so forth. 'March is the hardest month of the year for finding amusement.' I rather fancied Violet's purpose in life was to tide him over the winter months from last season till the next."

After the New Year the postmarks were in a steadily westerly direction, and early in May the travelers were expected to be in England once more. Mrs. Fitzroy's new house in Hampshire was now complete and ready for habitation, and arrangements were on foot for a party at Water-acre which should serve at once as a house-warming and a welcome home to the two guardians and their ward. Myra Woodbridge, John Stanford, Rodney Trelawney, Hugo Fitzroy and Mortimer Forrest were among those who were invited, and their arrivals had been spread over the two days preceding that on which Cyril and his fellow-travelers were expected. True to his reputation and the part for which he had cast himself, Mortimer Forrest arrived by a later train than he had indicated and carried a brief-bag as the most conspicuous feature of his extensive luggage.

On the day of the reunion Cyril was expected to arrive in time for dinner. The afternoon had been spent by Hugo, Mortimer, Johnny and Rodney in playing tennis, while Myra amused herself by cutting early roses for the bedrooms of the remaining guests. By six o'clock she was feeling restless and disinclined for conversation, and it appeared to her that by dressing for dinner without more delay and coming out again into the garden while the other visitors were divesting



themselves of the traces of their exertions, she would have an uninterrupted period for reflection before Cyril's arrival and the coming of dinner. She dressed in a leisurely fashion and wandered out into the rose-garden to find that her hostess, also dressed for dinner, was enjoying the cool, sweet air of the early evening in company with a book.

"You're dressed early, Myra," said Mrs. Fitzroy; "it is really very considerate of you. Now there is a possibility of Rodney being in time for dinner."

"What is the connection, Evelyn?"

"Why, my dear, Rodney has finished playing tennis, he will immediately begin looking for you, someone will tell him you were seen going up to dress ages ago, and Rodney will go and do likewise in the hopes of being able to talk to you before dinner."

"Rodney seeks my society very faithfully."

"And constancy, as usual, is unrewarded."

Myra laughed a little.

"Rodney has had all the pleasure and excitement of inconstancy for a life of more than thirty summers. He mustn't expect to make the best of both worlds by having a prosaic 'happy-ending' to his first essay in constancy. Besides, if he wants my society he gets it in full measure, too."

"And if he wants anything more, Myra?"

"He has been told he must not want anything more so far as I am concerned. I am very fond



of Rodney, he is *almost* everything that I like, and I think the task of keeping his affections centered in myself, if I married him, would almost be enough to call forth my fighting powers—the powers of which you disapprove so much, Evelyn dear. But Rodney and I meet on the terms of old friends, and if we pass that point we shall not be able to meet any more. It's not a bad arrangement, Evelyn; Rodney and I have had some very happy times during the last six months."

"It's not a bad arrangement for you, dear, but I question its fairness to Rodney. He is clinging to the hope that you will some day change your mind." She turned to look more closely at Myra. "If you were married or engaged to be married it would be different, and Rodney would see that his chances were gone and would look in other directions."

Myra smiled and took her companion's hand.

"Evelyn, be just to me. After the original breach I only met Rodney at your request, and both before and after that second meeting Rodney *has* looked in other directions."

"Like the needle of a compass, wavering a little from side to side, but in the end always turning to the cold immovable north. And all the while you have been searching for your luckless victim and preparing to galvanize him. Do you expect to meet him at Wateracre, Myra?"

"Who knows, Evelyn? You must wait until he is galvanized, I am not going to trail a succession of failures in front of you."



"And how does the process begin, Myra, dear? When you have found your ideal of apathy, how do you set about making him love you?"

A very gentle sigh escaped Myra as she answered.

"That is the problem which nearly all the world is trying to solve, all the men and all the married women and pretty young girls without money and middle-aged women without looks. If I knew the secret this earth would be a happy place and the rose-garden at Wateracre would not be marred by a single wistful expression. No, Evelyn," she added with a laugh, "the wistful expression belongs to me, and not to Rodney. Let me go my own wilful way, and let Rodney regard me as already dead or married and seek consolation elsewhere. And when we have gone our several ways you shall write my epitaph and his, and shall put into it that for the best part of one whole year Rodney remained more or less constant to one woman."

Hugo Fitzroy was walking through the rose-garden as she finished, a tennis-racquet in his hand, two sweaters and an overcoat on his arm.

"I didn't catch the beginning of the sentence, Myra," he remarked, "but if Rodney has remained constant to one woman for the best part of a year, the credit is due to me." He spread the overcoat carefully on the grass and lowered himself gingerly to its level. "Last autumn for my sins I was kept in London, and as my club was closed and I did not feel disposed to billet myself



on a strange club, I was driven each night to go and dine in restaurants. At the end of three weeks Rodney thought I was shadowing him; every night I went to a different place, and every night I ran into the arms of Rodney, dining and sparkling under the influence of a fresh pair of bright eyes. There seemed a fatality about the thing, so I sent for Rodney, showed him a large-scale map of London marked with red crosses, and impressed upon him that he was rapidly making our great metropolis uninhabitable and converting the capital of an empire into a repository for expiring romances."

Myra laughed.

"Did it have any effect, Hugo?"

"Not the slightest. I told him he ought to take a long sea-voyage, and even recklessly offered to accompany him. He retaliated by producing a large-scale map of the world on Mercator's Projection, also marked with red crosses to show the places he had once visited and did not choose—from motives of discretion—to visit again. Now I must go and dress."

"Is that story true, Hugo?" asked Myra as he gathered himself and his belongings from the grass.

"Not a word of it. Cyril's is the lying tongue that first gave it currency and I just adapted it for present requirements."

They sat for a few minutes in silence after he had gone, and then Evelyn asked:

"Is that a new dress you're wearing, Myra?"



"It's new to you, Evelyn, but I've had it for some time now. I got it for the ball Aunt Alice gave for me last spring and haven't worn it since."

"It suits you very well, and the roses in your hair agree with it perfectly. William Allen Richardsons, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Did you wear them last spring, too?"

"Yes, dear; not the same flowers, of course, but the same kind. And the necklace is the same. Let me go on reading your thoughts, Evelyn. This is the anniversary of the day I met Cyril, and I have spared no pains to present exactly the same appearance as I did that night. The first impressions are the ones men remember. I half thought of bending the catch of the necklace and making Cyril fasten it for me again. Yes, you're right, Evelyn, I don't think I shall ever grow up." She laughed and pressed her hand. "And the tragedy of it is that it will have not the slightest effect on our unsentimental Cyril."

They were interrupted by the sound of a car drawing up at the front door. Mrs. Fitzroy walked round to the front of the house to welcome her guests, while Myra remained on alone among the roses. Then after ten minutes had passed she got up and wandered through the open library window; the latest arrivals had retired to dress, and she sat talking to Hugo until a familiar voice sounded in the hall.

"Now then, Violet, in you go. Earl's daughters



take precedence of riff-raff like Enid and me. *Vide* Whitaker's Almanack *passim*." The door opened and Lady Violet entered the room, followed by her two guardians appropriately walking arm-in-arm. In appearance Lady Violet had changed more than her companions during her six months' absence from England. She seemed to have grown taller, older, and more self-possessed. The slightly wistful expression was seen less often in her big blue eyes, and Mrs. Fitzroy mentally agreed that Cyril had been right in thinking companionship was what she most lacked when living with her father. The small features, delicate coloring, and abundant golden hair were the same as when she left England; and as she walked into the library, dressed throughout in white with a diamond star as her sole ornament, it was not difficult to see that Enid and Cyril looked with approval on the results of their half-year's stewardship. Enid Sutherland showed no change of face or manner. The raven hair, pale face, and black, haunting eyes which had attracted Rodney's butterfly attention at Oxford and had since come to disturb the peace of Mortimer Forrest's mind were the same as both Morty and Rodney remembered them in the autumn, and the slow unfathomable smile which had baffled Cyril so often throughout the years he had known her, continued from time to time to light up her face and expose to view her white regular teeth.

The other guardian had evidently resolved that



his manner should conceal any change for better or worse that six months' responsibility had wrought in his temperament. A babel of welcome and inquiries had arisen as they entered the room, and Cyril walked round from one guest to another, his dark eyes critically examining each one and a slightly ironical smile playing over his thin features.

"Blood being thicker than water," he remarked, "I will first shake Hugo by the hand and tell him that his growing girth and thinning locks fill me with concern. I have four months in England, Hugo, and we must attend to your waist. As regards the hair, I have no advice to offer beyond telling you in general terms to recover your lost youth. Choose your own way. Whenever I am feeling old I go and order new underclothes; my hosier measures me and remarks, 'Slender gentleman's, sir,' and the illusion of youth is restored. He will not make that remark to you, by the way. Morty, I am proud to be recognized by you. Your fame traveled to Paris, where we read accounts of the Fairlight Murder Case in the Paris edition of the *Daily Mail*. Has the verdict been given yet?"

"Yes, it took the form of 'guilty,' followed by remarks about 'hanging by the neck till dead.'"

"Dear, dear! You—I think—were defending. Rodney, your eyes have the far-away look of one who searches for Ideals and finds them not. We found them without difficulty, not Perfection, but the Attempts at Perfection which you picked



up and discarded in your search. The Near East is littered with your unreal passions. And Johnny! I have not seen you since your quest for strange emotions and new thrills carried you to the desert to live on dates and ride on a camel. The life of a Bedouin is overrated, I imagine, Johnny, or you would not have abandoned it so soon."

While he talked Mrs. Fitzroy had been marshaling her guests in preparation for dinner, and Cyril found that it had fallen to his lot to take in Myra.

"This is just as it should be, Myra," he remarked. "It makes me at peace with the world to be back in England and to see you again. You're looking simply charming to-night, just as I've pictured you looking during these last six weary months."

"*Le mot juste* as usual, Cyril. Do you like this dress?"

"I've never seen one that suited you better. Was it made specially for to-night? I shall have to check this reckless extravagance when we are married."

"Oh, I've had it some time now, but—it's just been lying by in a drawer. Are you responsible for choosing Violet's dress, or is Enid allowed to have a word in the matter?"

"I drop the suggestions and Enid backs them up where practicable, with the present felicitous result. How do you think our ward is looking?"

"She does credit to you both. Has it been very hard work, Cyril? Johnny was speculating



the other day how long you'd be able to support the strain. The early days must have been dreadful, before you dropped into the habit of having to consider other people and subordinate your own convenience to theirs."

"How little you know me, Myra! You would have been surprised and ashamed to see how their wills were bent to mine. I couldn't have stood six months of it on other terms."

"I shall check that story by the accounts I get from your fellow-travelers. Anyway, it's nothing to boast of. You must remember you are on probation, Cyril; we are provisionally engaged pending the arrival of regeneration in your soul. Ten months have gone already."

"Has the sign appeared?"

"It's too early to say yet."

"When will you tell me?"

"Perhaps at the end of the two years and perhaps before you go to bed to-night. I shall have to talk to Enid and Violet before venturing an opinion." She turned to look at him more closely. "There's not much outward change yet, Cyril dear."

"I am vexed to hear it. One is always told that people with beautiful souls show it in their faces, at least that is the accepted explanation for the unusual number of inordinately plain faces which one meets in a day's march. I should like a beautiful soul even at the price of a trifling cast in the eye. Don't you think I've changed at all, Myra?"



"Oh, you have undoubtedly changed, but I sha'n't tell you yet awhile in what way."

"It is difficult for me to change for the worse; it is incredible that I should change for the better; if you insist that I have changed, Myra, you must tell me in what way."

"I am not thinking of better or worse. It may be that the sign has appeared and that you have learned to sacrifice yourself. *You* would call that a change for the better; *I* should call it—for myself—the honors of war without the fight I want to make. It may be that the infatuation of last July has become so strong that you want me to shorten the two years and absolve you from your self-imposed probation. Or it may be that you have outgrown the infatuation. Who knows? Now you are going to talk to Evelyn and I am going to talk to Morty."

Cyril obeyed her instructions better than she obeyed them herself. Mortimer Forrest was talking to Enid Sutherland and Myra was not sorry to sit silent and listen to the conversation around her. Lady Violet sat opposite and was giving John Stanford an account of her travels since their chance meeting in Egypt. Cyril's name occurred repeatedly in her description, the arrangements he had made, the trouble he had taken, the things they had seen and done at his suggestion, the books he had read to her, the eyes he had given her for seeing the places they had visited in the life and color that belonged to them when the world was young and history was still in the making.



"Cyril has set up such a high standard for cicerones," said Johnny, "and made himself so indispensable to you, that you'll never be able to travel without him."

"I came to that conclusion, Johnny, before we'd been away a week."

"And what happens when he goes on strike and clamors to get back to the Temple and the life of idleness?"

"I shall have to give up going abroad," she answered with great seriousness.

Myra let her attention wander to the conversation which Cyril was carrying on with Mrs. Fitzroy. In a tone of less enthusiasm and without her vivacity, Cyril was making a fair<sup>7</sup> compliment to Violet. The terms of admiration and affection in which he spoke of her showed that the guardianship had been a labor of love. At the end of the meal she was able to get a few minutes' conversation with Enid Sutherland.

"Well, Enid," she said, "we have all been wondering how you and your uncertain yoke-fellow would get on together. Did you find him a tractable and willing worker?"

"I had nothing to do but eat the manna which the Lord sent. Cyril arranged everything. Violet gave all the orders while I sat and basked in the sun. It carried me back to the days of the Arabian nights to hear our small friend Violet issuing her commands and to see our genius appearing out of a cloud of smoke, cigar in mouth, to do her bidding."



"Wasn't it rather a revelation to you?"

"No, I'd had glimpses of it before. If you cultivate the art of looking rather fragile and small and give him the impression that he's the only person in the world you have to turn to, and always preface your requests with 'Cyril dear, don't you think we might . . . ' or 'Cyril darling, would it be too much trouble . . . ' you would find him extraordinarily tractable. Violet discovered the secret a long time ago, though she doesn't know it yet. Perhaps she will find out some day."

"Perhaps they will both find out some day, and then the genius will retire into his bottle and refuse to come out."

"I rather hope not. You see Cyril at his best when you see him with Violet." Enid's black eyes were fixed intently on Myra's face. "Don't you agree with me?"

"I've hardly had an opportunity of seeing them together as yet, but I should think you are probably right."

They were interrupted by the entrance of the men from the dining-room, and conversation ranged round general subjects until Mrs. Fitzroy suggested a movement in the direction of bed. As Myra said good-night to Cyril he repeated the question he had put at dinner.

"Well, Myra, is the change for better or worse?"

"I can't add anything yet, Cyril, to what I told you before. There is a change, but you don't know what it is, and until the two years



are over I sha'nt tell you. You will probably know as much as I do in fourteen months' time." Then she went upstairs, calling in at Mrs. Fitzroy's room on the way to her own.

"Evelyn, the maid Cyril's engaged for Violet hasn't arrived yet, so I've sent mine to attend to her. Will you undo this dress for me?"

"I will, dear. Did it have the desired effect of recalling to Cyril's mind the night when you first laid yourself out to convert a happy bachelor into a reluctant lover?"

By way of answer Myra threw her arms round Mrs. Fitzroy's neck and laid her cheek against her own.

"Don't tease me to-night, Evelyn dear," she said, with a little tremor in her voice, "I'm not sure that I can bear it."

"Myra darling, I wouldn't hurt you for the world. What is the matter, dear? Don't cry."

"I'm not crying." She threw her head back to uncover her face and prove the truth of her words. A smile struggled to make its way through the troubled expression of her face.

"I'm only just a little bit tired—and unhappy," she added.



## CHAPTER XVI

### AFTER THE LAPSE OF A YEAR

*"Quis te redonavit Quiritem  
Dis patriis Italogue cælo?"—HORACE.*

"**W**E'LL give him another five minutes, Morty, and if he hasn't come then we won't wait dinner for him."

Hugo Fitzroy wandered disconsolately to the steps of the Cynics' Club and then rejoined Mortimer Forrest by the tape-machine.

"It wouldn't be Everard if he were in time for a meal, and, as Frobisher once remarked when an Indian student turned up late for one of his lectures, 'We must remember the gentleman has had some distance to come.' However, here is our friend in person. How are you, Everard? Two years have dealt kindly with you."

"How are you, my dear boy? Ah, Morty, and how are you? I hope I'm not late. Let's go in and start dinner at once. I've almost forgotten what club cooking is like."

"We've almost forgotten what the gay eupeptic Everard looks like," said Mortimer; "we thought you were never coming home."

"I don't quite know why I have." Everard



led the way into the coffee-room. "I went away because I was bored with England and I stayed away twice as long as I intended because I saw no reason why England should not bore me again if I returned. And now that I am back again, I don't know of anything to keep me here. It was quite pathetic at Marseilles to see my fellow-passengers hurling themselves into the black hole of the *Wagon-Lit* to get to England four days before the boat. I sat on deck and grew wistfully sentimental about myself and the lonely life I was leading, with nobody to love me, nobody to hurry home for." He spoke with eminent cheerfulness and attacked a dish of plovers' eggs with undisguised enthusiasm.

"Well, Morty and I will do the best we can to show you how we appreciate you and how much we've missed you. I tried to get Cyril here, but he doesn't get to London till to-morrow."

"And how is our Cyril shaping as a nurse-maid-in-ordinary? Darlington mentioned the thing to me in jest before I sailed, but when I heard it had actually been done, you might have knocked me down with a feather, as domestic servants say in moments of strong emotion."

"It seems to have worked very well," said Mortimer, "but we've seen almost as little of him as you have these last two years. Let me see, you went away in June two years ago. That autumn he went abroad and didn't return till last May. Then we caught occasional glimpses of him for about four months in the summer,



and this last autumn they went off again and are returning to-morrow."

"I rather gather that I am going to meet them later on in the week. Cyril told me he had accepted an invitation on my behalf to a party which Lady Delaunay is giving at her place. I don't in the least want to go, but Cyril has done such good work in choosing me a flat, engaging me a man, paying my bills, and dealing with my correspondence that I feel I can't do less than come and see his protégée."

"You'll meet us all there," said Hugo, "Morty and Rodney and John Stanford and others. Lady Delaunay is giving a small coming-out dance for Lady Violet."

"A coming-out dance! How old is the fair Lady Violet?"

"Just on eighteen, I think."

"And how old is Cyril?"

"Twenty-five."

"A little young to be guardian to a ward of eighteen! Have they been traveling about alone all this time?"

"Oh, no. There's been the other guardian, Mrs. Sutherland, to give an air of propriety to the party."

"Mrs. Sutherland? Ah—yes—I remember her; a very pretty, slight girl with a pale face and very black hair and eyes. Cyril's been traveling under pleasant conditions."

"I'm glad you should think that, because Morty is engaged to Mrs. Sutherland and is going



to marry her as soon as she is released from the trust."

"My dear Morty, I congratulate you. I am always glad to hear of other people marrying, it diverts attention from myself. Is anybody else taking the same courageous step?"

"Not that I know of; you will have to turn your attention to Cyril now that you're back in England."

"Almost the last words I spoke before sailing to India two years ago contained an exhortation to Cyril to get married. I drew a striking moral from my own life and urged him not to allow a second generation to commit the folly I've committed of letting the golden moment slip. I meant it, too, and Cyril saw I meant it."

"He's been so busy looking after Violet that he's had no time to think of anything else. I tell you, Everard, you will find him a different man. He's given up his quarters at the Temple, we hardly see him at the club, and every moment of his life is devoted to Violet's education. He wants to make her absolutely perfect, and their wanderings through Europe have been with that object. He's just wound up with a course of instruction from some maestro of the musical world in Brussels and the finished article is brought down to Lady Delaunay's to-morrow, to be admired of all men."

"I should imagine it's a wearing experience for the ward. I hope Cyril will not turn his attention to me when he's released from this trust and is



looking for fresh worlds to conquer. How does Lady Violet stand the strain?"

"She looks on Cyril as an inspired being from another world," said Mortimer, "and Cyril repays the compliment. To anyone but a fat cynic like Hugo it would be rather a charming idyll."

"And meantime what has happened to that pretty niece of Lady Delaunay's? I've forgotten her name, but Cyril was hand in glove with her before I went away and I had hopes of seeing a match being made."

"You mean Myra Woodbridge?"

"That's the girl. Has anything come of it, or is she merely one of Cyril's numerous romantic memories?"

"Heaven only knows! For two years everybody's been trying to fathom that business and at the end of the time we're none of us the wiser. She and Cyril seemed to be wrapped up in each other when first they met and Morty and I began looking up the price of inexpensive wedding presents. Then Cyril went away with Violet and Mrs. Sutherland, and no one knows how they stand at present."

"What's happened to the girl, Miss Woodbridge? I suppose she's consoled herself for the loss of Cyril by seeking someone else?"

"No. She meets Cyril in a free and unembarrassed manner when he's in England. They're great friends, and I sometimes harbor the idea that they're engaged. I know Myra wears a ring which Cyril gave her, but she wears it on the wrong hand, so that that is inconclusive."



"And Evelyn always says they're not engaged," added Hugo; "they certainly don't behave as if they were, and I know Evelyn keeps a vigilant eye on Myra in Rodney's interest."

"How does Rodney come into it?"

"Oh, Evelyn's been trying to make a match between Myra and Rodney for years. I don't know if Rodney is jibbing or whether it's Myra, but so far nothing's come of it, and Rodney is becoming rather a melancholy type of the Oxford don. He's given up trying to find consolation and to anyone who knows the size of Rodney's heart that is serious news."

"Well, well!" Everard pulled his chair in to the table to get a better purchase on the cheese. "You young men don't seem to have made much history in my absence. Morty is committing marriage and Cyril is turning into a useful member of society, those seem to be the only changes. Everyone else is two years older and two years fatter and two years balder. Rodney is becoming joyless and narrow-minded behind his convent wall, Miss Woodbridge (don't tell her I said so) is like the ass between two or more bundles of hay. Hugo is becoming a confirmed bachelor, unrepentant and unwarned by my example, and I am very much as you last saw me, only a shade more restless and a trifle more easily bored. Is that a fair summary of the position?"

"I think it is." Hugo arrested a passing waiter and sent him in search of port wine. "And if you went away to-morrow for another two years



you would find equally little change at the end of the time. Hardly a death to brighten the annals of the family. You'd better turn your time in England to good account, Everard, by making a little history on your own account. Marriage is always near your heart, and you have yourself, myself, Cyril, Rodney, and Johnny all ready at hand."

"Well, it's unpromising material, but I'll see what can be done. First of all I want to renew my acquaintance with Cyril and the wonderful ward and the future Mrs. Mortimer Forrest."

"I'm afraid you won't see her for a few weeks, Everard," said Morty. "Partnership has been temporarily dissolved at Brussels. Enid has gone south to stay for a few days with friends at Frankfurt, and Cyril is bringing Violet over single-handed. Lady Delaunay is taking charge of her till Enid's return."

"Then I must teach my restive spirit patience till that day. This is very fair port, Hugo, doubly acceptable after the wine of Samaria I have been drinking on board."

"And what precisely is wine of Samaria?" asked Mortimer as they rose from the table.

"Wine which is made to be mixed with oil and poured into the wounds of such as go down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fall among thieves by the way. Now let's come and get something to smoke."

The following afternoon saw Everard comfortably established at Delaunay Towers. With



the well-developed instinct of self-preservation which characterized the Fitzroys he had secured to himself the shadiest tree, the roomiest chair, and the company of Myra Woodbridge, the best-looking girl of the party. John Stanford had joined them, bringing with him a suitable supply of cigarettes, and for Everard, eyeglass in eye and hands locked across his substantial form, there seemed nothing lacking in the surroundings which conduce to contentment.

"I was dining with Hugo and young Morty Forrest last night," he observed, "and to the best of their ability they justified their existence during the past two years. It was rather a lamentable chronicle; I hope you've got something better to show for it, Johnny."

"I have no reason to be dissatisfied with my life, Mr. Fitzroy. It has been perfectly successful since last we met."

"I suppose that means the Samurai have been increasing and multiplying?"

"The Samurai? Oh, that thing of Darlington's; no, I was not meaning that."

"That thing of Darlington's! It is no way to speak of an important movement in the direction of social reform, a movement which was receiving your prominent support two years ago."

"It has served its purpose; it supplied me with a new experience, a new emotion. There was a fine crusading spirit about it which appealed to me at the time; then when I had drunk my fill I moved on to new waters."



"And where did they take you?"

"To Armenia, to Italy, and the Desert. I made a round of the most accessible religions, spending six months in an Armenian monastery of the Orthodox Church, three months in an Italian village, going daily to Mass and confessing regularly, and ending up with four months on the fringe of the Sahara. I met Cyril as I was setting out, and our meeting was like the meeting of Richard Burton and his anonymous friend in the mosque at Mecca. You remember the story? Burton impenetrably disguised, as he thought, worshipping nineteen to the dozen, and hoping no friendly Mussulman would detect him as an infidel and put a knife in his back, and the voice of an anonymous friend behind him remarking in bell-like tones, 'Rather different this, Burton, from the Fifth Form at Charterhouse.' So with me. I was riding along on a camel trying to induce the frame of mind proper to a devout Bedouin when I heard the languid voice of Cyril saying, 'For the love of Allah, take off those deplorable clothes, Johnny.' "

Everard laughed. "Do you really do these things, and do they really give you any new sensations worth having?"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Fitzroy. I don't think you appreciate the effect of clothes on character. I always wear black when I'm feeling depressed; it was a lesson learned from Cyril, who always uses mourning note-paper when he's not feeling at his best. If you go into the right surroundings,



breathe the proper atmosphere and wear the appropriate clothes, you become a part of every place you visit, you live the life of a dozen different nationalities and faiths, and compress a score of different existences into one."

" 'In Rome do as the Romans do?' "

"Exactly, which is the one thing the average Englishman never does in Rome. He stays at an English hotel, races round with an English-speaking guide, improves his mind on the *New York Herald* (Paris edition) and the novels of the Tauchnitz library, wears only English clothes, eats only English food, and returns home as quickly as possible to spend the rest of his days comparing Italy and England, ancient civilization and modern, in a manner highly favorable to the land which has had the honor of giving him birth."

"Which method of travel does Cyril adopt, Johnny," asked Myra, "the average tourist's or the Stanford specialty?"

"I'm not sure, Myra. In the old days before the regeneration of Cyril he was never tired of reviling my search for new emotions. We used to argue about it till the stars disappeared and the morning sun struggled to penetrate the tobacco smoke. I told him life was only worth living to the extent to which you saw it as a whole, every aspect, every way of life, every phase of faith. I told him you could only see life in that way by clutching at every new experience that floated within your reach and by going out of your way to taste of new emotions



and drag them into your life with both hands. Modern existence is so easy and mechanical and comfortable that it has lost all its color, all its danger and romance, and my way was the way to bring it all back again."

"I can almost hear Cyril's answer." Myra laughed and passed Everard a fresh cigarette. "He lay back in his chair with half-closed eyes, cigar in mouth, stroking that huge black cat of his and talking about the spurious revival of the Byronic Cult."

"Yes, he told me I should have to die of fever at Missolonghi."

"I thought so. And then a long attack on the unwisdom of cultivating one's emotions, emotions as good servants and bad masters, detached and sexless intellect as the only thing in life worth fostering, and a peroration, the usual peroration, exhorting you to follow his example, keep yourself unspotted from the ways of men, leave them to solve the troubles of their own making, and live like him in a rarified atmosphere where love and hate and human interests have no part."

"I seem to have heard that homily from Cyril before now," assented Everard.

"We have all heard it," said Johnny, "and such of us as have a sense of irony are amused to see the way in which practice has fallen short of precept. Cyril as Lady Violet's guardian is a sad falling away from Cyril living unspotted from the ways of men and leaving them to solve the troubles of their own making. He should have followed my example," he added, with a smile.



"I am glad to find *someone* who is satisfied with the life he has been leading while I have been away," said Everard. "I had rather a gloomy account from Morty Forrest last night. He excepted himself; two years ago he set out to find a wife who would bring inspiration to his work and he claims to have found her, but Hugo, Rodney, Cyril, and the rest he wrote down as failures. What of yourself, Miss Woodbridge? Have you managed to realize the ideal of life which you set before your eyes, or didn't you bother about ideals two years ago?"

"I don't know that a girl has much scope for ideals of life, Mr. Fitzroy. She occupies a secondary place and has to fit in to the ideals which others make for her. That is her poor, limited function."

"No, her function is higher." Everard was gazing with frank admiration into the unwavering brown eyes before him. "The gods have set apart a man and ordained that she shall come into his life like a gospel giving tidings of a new heaven and a new earth."

"And have the gods shown her how to find him, have they marked him out from his fellows?"

"There is no need. She knows without the help of the gods that there is one for whom she would sacrifice everything in the world."

"And does *he* always know it?"

"If he does not it is her business to teach him."

"And how does she set about that?"

"Miss Woodbridge, that is the secret of your sex."



"A secret which very few of my sex have mastered. Johnny, be a polite boy and bring up another chair for my aunt. Aunt Alice, you have missed the most improving words I have ever heard spoken by a member of the Fitzroy family."

"Everard, your travels have unbalanced you." Lady Delaunay took the chair which Johnny had fetched her. "You mustn't take risks with yourself. What were the improving words?"

"Merely a highly poetical treatment of the idea that in marriage man plays a minor part, and that in every one of the early stages up to and including the proposal he is acting under the hypnotic suggestion of the woman."

"That is rather a prosaic and chilling interpretation of your original rhapsody, Mr. Fitzroy," said Johnny.

"It is, my boy, but you will find it a useful retort in the altercations of married life to say that you were married in a cataleptic condition."

As he was speaking a footman approached Lady Delaunay and handed her a telegram. She put on her glasses to read it, remarking: "I do hope this doesn't mean that some of my most cherished guests are going to play me false. Oh, how dreadful!"

She handed the flimsy paper over to Myra; it was from Cyril:

"Regret unable to come. Violet indisposed. Farraday fears diphtheria. No immediate cause for anxiety. Cyril."



“‘No immediate cause for anxiety,’” commented Johnny. “I hope that is true.”

“It’s too early to say yet, it hasn’t had time to get critical, let alone the after-effects.” Lady Delaunay had lost a son through diphtheria. “And I suppose, with Enid in Germany, poor Cyril has got to deal with it single-handed. I wish I knew how I could help him.”

“He’s got the best possible man in Farraday, Lady Delaunay,” said Everard. “I’m afraid there’s nothing for it but to sit still and hope for better news. By the way, I’m going back to town to-morrow morning; you won’t want a superfluous house-party to amuse while you’ve got this trouble on hand.”

In the course of the next two days the house-party had broken up and gone its several ways. Rodney alone stayed on, at the special request of Myra.

“I shall want somebody to talk to, Rodney,” she said, when he suggested leaving. “If we don’t get any fresh news to-morrow I shall go up to London and inquire at the house how she is. Will you come with me and cheer me up, Rodney? I know I’m rather distracted and helpless,” she added, with an apologetic smile, “but I can’t help feeling that Cyril is keeping something back and that he would have told us by now if she were going on all right. Poor Cyril! If anything happened to Violet I simply don’t know what he would do.”

“Don’t let’s meet trouble half way, Myra.



Violet has got science and youth and a sound constitution all fighting on her side; she'll pull through, I haven't the slightest doubt."

"And what about Cyril?"

"Oh, I wasn't even thinking of him. If we know our Cyril we can trust him to take all ordinary precautions and not to run his head into danger."

"Yes, I suppose so." Myra spoke without conviction. "If we know our Cyril. I'm not sure that I do."



## CHAPTER XVII

### INSTANCE OF VERSATILITY IN CYRIL

“And if the wine you drink, the lips you press,  
End in the Nothing all things end in, Yes,  
Then fancy while thou art, thou art but what  
Thou shalt be, Nothing. Thou shalt not be less!”

—OMAR KHAYYAM.

TWO days later Myra Woodbridge arrived in town alone. Rodney had been unable to absent himself any longer from his duties in Oxford, and Myra had not thought fit to tell Lady Delaunay the object of her journey for fear of alarming her aunt, who was nervous on the subject of infectious diseases, and might quite possibly place a veto on the whole proceeding. She drove from the station to Charles Street and inquired for Cyril. The footman told her Mr. Fitzroy had gone off earlier in the afternoon to his club—the Cynics’ Club—and was not expected back in Charles Street till after dinner. Wondering a little that Cyril should be ready to abandon his post of duty for so many hours on end, Myra crossed the corner of St. James’s Square on foot and was mounting the steps of the club when she was nearly knocked down by Mortimer Forrest, who was hurrying into the street with a handful of papers in search of a taxi.



"Morty, is Cyril inside here?" she asked.

"He is, I've been talking to him. I say, that poor child seems pretty bad."

"I called at Charles Street to inquire, but they told me Cyril was at the club, and as I'm never very trustful of a bulletin issued by a footman, I thought I'd make him come out of hiding and tell me with his own lips how she was."

"You'd better approach the subject delicately, I think Cyril's nerves are rather on the raw. I turned up here for lunch, and he was sitting in the morning-room with his hat on, staring out of the window. Nobody'd seen him for six months, and it was like the dying Alexander and his generals filing sadly and silently through his tent. Everyone wanted to know how he was and if he was lunching, and how the patient was getting on, till Cyril was nearly ready to throw his stick at them. I talked to him on general topics after lunch; he didn't mention Violet, and I thought better not to allude to her. I'll go in and tell him you're here." He went back into the club and reappeared two minutes later with Cyril. "Now I must say good-bye, Myra; I'm due at Chambers for a consultation." He hurried off, leaving Myra and Cyril on the steps of the club.

"Well, Myra, it is very kind of you to come and hunt me out like this. I was just feeling that another five minutes of my fellow-members would send me flying down the street with straw in my hair. Let me have a good look at you, dear; I've not seen you for nearly seven months.



No, there's no change, you're not a day older than when I first met you two years ago. Come into the park, where we can sit and talk and smoke in peace."

They turned to the right, down the Duke of York's steps, crossed the Mall, and found two chairs in a secluded part of the park. Cyril produced a cigar-case from his pocket, selected a cigar and with great deliberation cut and lit it. Myra had an opportunity of studying his face in the process. He was looking rather thinner and paler than usual, his dark eyes under their long lashes were a trifle more weary, and the lines from nose to mouth were slightly harder than she had seen them before. So far as she could make out he was cultivating an air of elaborate self-possession; the immaculate appearance of his clothes, the flower in his buttonhole, and his collected, dispassionate manner of speech gave an effect of rather studied nonchalance. Remembering Mortimer Forrest's warning, she waited for him to broach the subject of her presence in London.

"Well, Myra," he remarked, when the cigar was lit, "I am afraid between us Violet and I have rather spoiled your aunt's party. I was very sorry about it; we both looked forward to coming. You will have to make our apologies when you see her. How soon are you going down to the country again?"

"I think I shall have to go back to-night. She doesn't know where I am. I only told her I was running up to town for the day."



"Either you ought not to have come or you ought not to be going back so soon. For those who can appreciate it, the country in May is a thing one should never want to leave; having left it and successfully established oneself in London, nothing should tear one away. It argues restlessness: 'when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life,' as Dr. Johnson remarked, not knowing that to the female mind London only conjures up a picture of milliners' shops."

"I didn't come up to shop, Cyril."

"No, you came up to see me, Myra, but you shouldn't have made me drag the admission from you."

"Yes, I came to see you and to ask after Violet. I felt so sorry for you, Cyril, all alone, without Enid to share the burden, and I wondered if I could be any help to you."

"I don't think so, Myra, though it's very kind of you to offer. The chances are about ten to one against Violet living, she's in a critical condition, and the big final struggle will probably come to-night."

"My God!" There was a sinking at her heart as she listened to him. "Can nothing be done, Cyril?"

"As regards Violet, no. As regards ourselves, yes. If the one chance comes off, well, it's a point gained. If, as I expect, the nine chances are too much for her, we had better make up our minds to face it. I have made mine up. That was what annoyed me so at the club, to see a



succession of men with long faces coming up and asking in hushed voices how Violet was. I never knew there was so much misdirected sympathy in the world, and as usual it was all with the kindest and best intentions."

"Oh, Cyril, for pity's sake don't talk like that when she's lying fighting for her life and suffering heaven only knows what pain."

"Pain!" He shivered a little. "That's the one thing we have never been able to explain away. We've explained love and hate and fear and death and God and hell, explained them so well that they have ceased to exist for some of us, but we've never been able to explain away pain."

"We have never explained away death."

"We have laughed it out of court. When death was the dividing line between this world and an unknown existence, a dark, joyless existence maybe, or a time of trial and punishment, anyway an existence of uncertainty, we were afraid of stepping into the darkness. Now we believe, some of us at least, that at death we pass out of existence in a dreamless, never-ending sleep. *That* prospect cannot frighten us, Myra, that is the way in which we beat death."

"Our own death, yes, if we believe in the dreamless, eternal sleep, but not the death of others. It might comfort us to know that Violet was sleeping peacefully and painlessly, but it wouldn't compensate us for our own loss. We haven't learned to explain away the loss of those we love, Cyril."



"The philosophers have. They have reduced these losses to their right proportions, set them in their proper perspective. In fifty years' time, when I am seventy-five and my sons are past middle-life, they will remember the story I tell them about Violet, and will explain that I stood guardian to her, when strangers ask questions about the portrait or this miniature. They will have no pangs in speaking of her, and I—well, Myra, it is rather wasted energy crying over a person who is dead. It doesn't bring them back, and the philosopher learns to husband his tears for the living, to work on their feelings when every other means has failed. And in a hundred years' time, what will be remembered of Violet by my grandsons? No, Myra, you must thank the philosophers for reducing us to a sense of our own insignificance."

"That is the old argument of two years ago, Cyril. I thought you had outgrown it."

"Two years have only shown how right I was. I have been amazed at my own precocious wisdom."

"*'Laudo manentem. Si celeres quatit  
Pennas, resolvo quæ dedit et mea  
Virtute me involvo probamque  
Pauperiem sine dote quæro.'*

Did they teach you Horace at Wycombe Abbey, Myra?"

"No. I don't think I was sufficient of a philosopher to stand it. They gave me Herodotus



to read," she added as an afterthought, "not in the Greek, though. I acknowledge my inferiority."

"And what brings Herodotus to your mind?"

"I was thinking of the marriage of Cleisthenes' daughter, and the behavior of the suitor Hippocles who stood on his head on the table and waved his feet in the air. And I was thinking of Cleisthenes' remark: 'Son of Tisander, thou hast danced thy wife away.'"

"And of Hippocles' retort? 'Devil a bit does Hippocles care.' What bearing has that on the present case?"

"You are arguing and explaining away your wife, Cyril. If you can talk so calmly of Violet's death, you will talk as calmly of anyone's death, mine for instance. And if in fifty or a hundred years' time we have all settled down to our proper perspective, posterity will say that it didn't much matter that Myra and Cyril never married. I cannot support life on the amount of affection which a dispassionate posterity may mete out as my due."

"No, you have leagued yourself with the generation that asks a sign. How strange it is to look back two years, and how gratifying to one's self-esteem to see that oneself was right and everyone else was wrong! Two years ago you would have married me in my unregenerate condition. I told you then what you now admit, that marriage is insupportable if the parties to it are not prepared to abandon their philosophy of detach-



ment and sacrifice themselves to their partners. We are both of us still waiting, Myra, for the Ethiopian to change his skin, and you now agree that the old skin was impossible for everyday family life." He pushed his hat to the back of his head and began tracing patterns in the gravel with his stick. "And Everard, too. He should be here to see my words justifying themselves. I told Everard down at Anstruther that the only way to secure peace of mind was to isolate oneself from one's fellows and avoid contamination with their troubles. Like you, Everard held the view that that was shutting out from life all that made life endurable. The Anstruther Trust has shown who was right; we haven't time or strength in this world to carry other people's crosses, Myra. I had quite a struggle to argue myself back into the old attitude of detachment. And Johnny should have been here." His voice lost a little of its self-command and he dug savagely at the gravel. "The last few days would have given Johnny psychologic conditions and new emotions to last him the term of his natural life. He would have learned a lot. It took God the best part of a day—according to Genesis—to create a man. Johnny would have found that when a man has his nervous system properly thrown out of gear he can create a god in half the time."

Myra sat listening to him in silence. In spite of his aggressive repudiation of all sympathy, she felt that the one thing he wanted above all others was a hearer in whose presence he might com-



pensate himself for the lonely and wordless anxiety of the last few days. She had been shocked at first by the lack of feeling he had displayed in speaking of Violet's illness and the philosophic calm with which he faced the possibility of her death, and a touch of resentment had betrayed itself in her voice. Perhaps Cyril noticed this, for his tone was more conciliatory when he began to speak again.

"Well, Myra, as a matter of form I suppose I ought to be getting back to Charles Street. Don't pass sentence on me yet or say that Hippocrides has talked away his bride. I've had enough on my mind without that, and in any case there are two months to run before my probation is made up and I come for your final decision. I don't honestly see many signs of amelioration and you probably don't either, and I'm afraid my conversation this afternoon has thrust me back to where I stood when the probation started. Never mind; you can be philosophic about death and yet get a good deal of enjoyment out of life. When I am dead it wouldn't bring me back or make my torments lighter to know that you were wearing widow's weeds. I should want you to console yourself for my lamented decease in the best and quickest fashion you know. And you might find that I could be very calm and collected about your death and yet lavish on you all the little store of affection at my command during your lifetime."

They walked back to Charles Street and parted



at Lord Darlington's door. Cyril, who had been forbidden by the doctor to approach the sick-room, wandered into the library to read and smoke. At intervals came callers with inquiries, but he would not see them, and at intervals Lady Violet's maid appeared with a laden tray. Sir James Farraday called in later in the evening to report that no change had taken place in his patient's condition, and then night fell. Cyril was disinclined for bed and paced up and down the library lost in thought. How long this continued he never knew, but it was with a shock that he came out of his reverie to find the light of another day waning and to hear a knock at the door breaking the long silence of the library. It was Lady Violet's maid.

"I came to see if I might bring you something to eat, sir," she said, not for the first time. Cyril ceased his perambulation and looked at her a little dizzily before replying. The air was heavy with the scent of innumerable strong cigars, the carpet covered with a film of white ash. In the middle of the room stood a round table showing traces of a succession of untasted meals which the perplexed maid had not ventured to clear away. They ranged from eggs, toast, and a coffee-pot by way of homard au gratin, asparagus and Camembert cheese, to a teapot and plate of thinly cut bread and butter. A solitary cup with the dregs of black coffee in it stood isolated on the mantelpiece and bore testimony to his success in taking nourishment. Cyril looked at the table and smiled a little grimly.



"I'm afraid it's not much use, Mary. I somehow don't seem hungry."

"You've had nothing all day, sir."

"Haven't I? Oh, surely I must have! What's the time now?"

"Nine o'clock, sir. Shall I draw the curtains?"

"No. Yes. Just as you like, Mary. Yes, do please, and turn on the lights. Has the doctor come back yet?"

"Yes, sir, he came back about an hour ago."

"Is he still with Lady Violet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, don't let him go without my seeing him."

"Very good, sir."

The door closed and Cyril resumed his interrupted pacing. Once he paused, picked up a pipe and blew down it. It was choked up. He seemed to remember that he had tried the same thing with the same result that day, or the previous night, or the day before, or some time—he could not say when. Anyway it did not matter, only it was annoying to lose count of time like this. He took a cigar from a box by the window, put it into his mouth and wondered why it would not light. Then he remembered that he had not cut it, and when this had been successfully accomplished he replaced it in his mouth. Nearly half an hour had elapsed before he noticed that it was still unlit. He was trying to recollect where he had last seen any matches, when the door opened and Sir James Farraday entered the library. Cyril braced himself for a concentrated



effort of attention, and was relieved—albeit somewhat surprised—to find that under pressure he could still get his brain to do his bidding.

“What is the news, Sir James?” he asked.

“None of the best, I fear, Mr. Fitzroy. I am afraid she has not rallied since I was here before.”

“Is she any worse, or just stationary?”

“Worse, I am afraid.” The doctor’s voice was very grave, and Cyril drew himself up and looked him full in the face to receive the blow.

“You had better tell me whatever there is to tell, Sir James. I shall have to know it some time and I may as well know it now.”

“Then I must tell you that I do not think she can last another hour. I don’t know if you are at all familiar with diphtheria, Mr. Fitzroy, but there are two dangers which the patient has to face: one is general collapse, which may carry her off in a very short space of time; the other is the spreading of the false membrane into the air-passages of the throat, causing asphyxiation. I am afraid the false membrane is getting the better of us.”

“Nothing can be done?” His voice was quite mechanical.

“Nothing more.”

“Don’t they sometimes put in a tube and suck the false membrane, or whatever it is, away? I’ve read about it somewhere.”

“It is sometimes done, but I cannot take the responsibility of recommending it.”

“Why not?”



The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"The risk is too great. There is a chance that you may save the patient, but you are running the risk of the patient dying after infecting the other and endangering his life. In Lady Violet's case, even if the membrane were withdrawn from the air-passages, I am not sure that we should be able to keep her strength up."

"Two probables against one certain?"

"Exactly."

"And is there the slightest hope of it's doing any good in the present case?"

"It might, though; as I said before, I cannot take the responsibility of recommending such a course. It is just a chance."

"But admittedly the only chance?"

"Admittedly."

"Then I propose to take the risk."

The doctor was lost in thought for a moment. Then he said:

"Mr. Fitzroy, do you appreciate properly what you are doing? I cannot consent to being a party to this unless you fully understand the consequences of your action. It is by no means certain that you will do any good and there is every possibility of your being brought to the same condition as Lady Violet. You understand that?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I have nothing more to say, except that it is very courageous of you, Mr. Fitzroy."

"Not courageous, merely conscientious. I regard it as part of a guardian's extensive and



peculiar duties." Cyril's manner had perceptibly brightened at the prospect of escape from the harrowing inaction of the last twenty-four hours. "Now, will you please tell me what I have to do?"

The doctor walked to the door.

"Come this way, Mr. Fitzroy, and get into some hollands, and then I will show you how it's to be done."

It was daylight before the doctor left the house. He had with difficulty prevailed on Cyril to go to bed and had insisted on a sleeping-draught, as his new patient showed signs of becoming light-headed. The house now contained two isolation wards, as Cyril was pledged not to leave his room on any pretext until such time as Sir James should declare him free from infection, though he was still able to keep in communication with the outside world through the medium of the telephone, the receiver of which the doctor had carefully removed.

For thirty hours Cyril enjoyed unbroken slumber and awoke with a feeling of wonderful refreshment and a ravening hunger. He rang the bell and, when the maid's voice was heard outside the door, inquired for the latest news of Lady Violet.

"She had a good night, sir, and is going on well. The doctor is coming round again and will see you if you are awake. He looked in when he was here before, but you were still asleep. He said you ought to have some soup as soon as you woke up."



"Yes, Mary, we'll get to that in a moment. Is Lady Violet still delirious?"

"Oh, no, sir. She's been herself since yesterday morning, but she's very weak and sleeps most of the time."

"Right, Mary; now for breakfast. I don't know that I can face soup, but some tea, toast, a fried sole, and an occasional egg would be grateful and comforting. Leave them on the mat when you're ready and I'll come and fetch them. This room's still infected, so you mustn't come inside."

"Very good, sir. Are you feeling better, sir?"

"Right as rain, thanks, Mary, as you will see by the breakfast. Let me have it before Sir James comes and then if he forbids me to eat solid food it will be too late and I shall be one square meal to the good."

"Yes, sir. Would you like your letters, sir?"

"Oh, yes, please, Mary. My own and any for Lady Violet, and the morning papers. Oh, and some tobacco and a pipe; and can you get me a hair-pin and some feathers? I seem to remember that most of my pipes are out of action."

Sir James Farraday was surprised out of his professional placidity by the spectacle presented by Cyril's sick-room. The bed was drawn up to the window so that nothing in the street should escape observation; the floor was littered with newspapers and envelopes; on the dressing-table lay the ruins of a once sumptuous repast, and in the bed, propped up with pillows and smoking



a peculiarly black and guttural pipe, was the form of Cyril Fitzroy clad in the invariable white silk pajamas and surrounded by letters, the answers to which he had been dictating to someone at the other end of the telephone.

"Then there's one from your aunt, Myra, filled with kind inquiries and so forth. Can she be of any assistance? She called but was not admitted to the house. Look here, you'll be seeing her, won't you? Tell her that Violet is on the high-road to recovery. Oh, me? I'm all right, only I'm not allowed out of the lazaretto till I'm certified free of infection. Good day, Sir James, excuse me one moment. Myra, I'm going to ring off now. Sir James Farraday has called to say I am to be quiet and avoid all excitement. Good-bye. Now, Sir James, I am at your service."

"Well, Mr. Fitzroy, you don't look in need of a medical adviser."

"I don't feel it; but what news of Lady Violet?"

"Going on well. It's only a question of lying quiet and getting up her strength. Another fortnight or so and she'll be convalescent, and you can take her away into the country."

"It was a near thing."

"Touch and go, and you must look after her very carefully for some time. Is she a good sailor?"

"Yes; why?"

"Well, why not take her away for a sea-voyage? It's the finest tonic in the world and will do her



more good than anything I can suggest on dry land. Fresh sea-air night and day, she'll divide her time between eating and sleeping, and come back completely restored to health. Why not run out to India and render an account of your stewardship to her father?"

"It's worth considering. I must consult her other guardian. The Anstruther Trust has got rather mixed up, Sir James, by my colleague getting engaged to be married. I don't know how Mortimer Forrest will like my taking Mrs. Sutherland away for three or four months when she ought to be in England attending to her trousseau. How soon will Lady Violet be able to sail?"

"Say another fortnight or so actually in bed, then a week to feel her feet and another week or so in the country. She'll be ready for you in six weeks' time. By the way, has anyone told Lord Darlington about this business?"

"I haven't, but he's bound to see it in the papers. I'll cable out that she's been ill but is all right again now. That will keep him from worrying."

"I think that will be the best course. And now I'm going to overhaul you and take a swab of your throat. Do you feel a bit stiff in the back after the antitoxin?"

"Just a little. I've had it before, of course, when I had diphtheria myself. Then I didn't mind the injection or its effects half so much as the ceremonial purification that came first. They



got hold of the tender skin of my back and flayed me with carbolic and a scrubbing-brush."

The doctor laughed and proceeded with his examination. The swab was carefully sealed up and pocketed and an exhaustive scrutiny made of the throat and nose.

"Now, Mr. Fitzroy, I'm going to send this to the bacteriological people and if we're in luck's way I hope to give you a clean bill of health in a couple of days' time. Meanwhile, try to lie quiet and get up your strength; you've had a pretty exacting time the last few days."

"Oh, I'm all right now, never felt better. A trifle unwashed and unshaven, but otherwise the picture of orderly good health. As soon as you're gone I propose to do battle with about five days' growth of beard. Hallo! my mirror's been taken away!"

"Yes, I did that."

"Were you afraid of my falling in love with my own image and forgetting to make a good recovery?"

"No." Sir James hesitated and then picked a reflector out of his bag. "You've changed a bit the last few days and I didn't want you to see it till you were all right. There's no harm now."

He held out the reflector. At first Cyril saw only the unchecked luxuriance of four days' growth of beard on his face. Then he leaned forward and caught the reflection of his hair in the mirror. When last seen it had been light brown throughout, growing fairer as it approached



the forehead. Now it was plentifully sprinkled with gray with an admixture of white at the temples. He looked up into the doctor's face.

"It's quite patriarchal, Sir James. I shall never pass for twenty-five again."

"It's an honorable scar, Mr. Fitzroy."

"And fortunately unlike most honorable scars in that it will yield to treatment by hair-dye."

"But why disguise it? It makes you a far more imposing figure as Lady Violet's guardian."

"Yes; but think of Everard—you know my uncle, don't you? It makes me look middle-aged. I shall never be able to look Everard in the face again."



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A BREACH OF MEDICAL ETIQUETTE

“Just when we are safest, there’s a sunset touch,  
A fancy from a flower-bell, someone’s death,  
A chorus-ending from Euripides,  
And that’s enough for fifty hopes and fears  
As old and new at once as Nature’s self,  
To rap and knock and enter in our souls,  
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring.”

—BROWNING.

“WELL, Cyril, what have you done with your charge?”

Rodney Trelawney drew up a chair beside Cyril’s and felt in his pocket for a cigarette. They were sitting in the shade of the large elms on the lawn at Delaunay Towers, whither Lady Violet and her guardian had come a week earlier in search of country air and quiet before sailing to India.

“She’s indoors with the medicine-man. He motored down after lunch to-day for a final examination before we start.”

“How soon are you off?”

“If he passes her all right, we shall sail in ten days’ time.”

“And how long are you going to be away?”

“I don’t know. It largely depends on how



soon Enid is recalled by Morty and Hymen. We shall go straight to Calcutta and, I suppose, spend a week or two with her father, but beyond that nothing's decided. We may come back the same way, or we may go on to Japan and return by way of the States."

"You'll be missed, Cyril."

"Rodney, you are too kind." He bowed ironically. "If I could think of something equally nice to say to you, I'd say it—but inspiration is in abeyance at the moment."

"Oh, I wasn't meaning myself. I was thinking of Myra."

"You'll have to console her in my absence."

Rodney laughed.

"I'll do my best to fill the aching void. It amuses me to think of us all three being under the same roof here."

"Why so?"

"In the light of a certain meeting at a way-side country station two years ago and of my precipitate return to town. Not to mention the resolution we each of us formed to eschew the lady's company."

"It's not so easy to avoid meeting a person as one would think. I solemnly intended never to cross her path again, but I ran into her three times in the next week. It's almost an impossibility unless you're going to cross the road every time you see her and jump up from the dinner table just because you see her the other side of it. Looks rather odd, too, and sets foolish tongues wagging. You probably found it the same?"



"Yes. I met her soon afterwards at your aunt's house and she told me she could not afford to lose her best friends because she felt unable to be more than a friend to them. She was awfully sweet about it, and in common decency I couldn't go out of my way to avoid her after that, even if I'd wanted to." Rodney reflectively watched the smoke of his cigarette curling upwards in a widening wreath. "I sometimes think I should have been wiser if I had stuck to my original idea—but it's not altogether easy to keep away from her." Cyril nodded without answering. "Of course it's different for you in a way. You've got Lady Violet to look after and I don't imagine you ever feel any great need for female society; but it's different if you live in college with a common-room full of gross material dons. It makes you pine to get away from them." There was still no answer and Rodney was content to pursue his own line of reflection. "Looking back on it all from a more or less detached point of view, I begin to see an element of humor in the situation which was not so clear when you pointed it out to me two years ago. I retired from the fight because I'd been beaten and because I thought you were going to be the lucky man; you refused to compete because you thought I had a better claim, and here we all are with the years rolling over our heads—two, to be accurate—and the fair Myra seems as elusive as ever."

Cyril sat abruptly upright in his chair.

"We make rather a pitiful spectacle, Rodney.



Not one of us knows his own mind. I fancy I have a glimmering of what way the land lies, but you and Myra are still in outer darkness. I shall talk seriously to her before I go away."

"About yourself?"

"For a wonder—no. I shall talk to her about you."

"Not on the forbidden topic, Cyril."

"My dear boy, there are no forbidden topics when I talk to Myra. I tell her what is for her soul's good in a variety of ways—and I shall tell her now."

"Have you ever put the question to her yourself?"

Cyril looked at the questioner and then burst out laughing.

"Rodney, what a question! You must ask her yourself. She's coming out of the house now with Violet and the doctor." He got up and collected three more chairs for the new-comers. "Well, Sir James, is the inspection satisfactory?"

"Perfectly satisfactory, Mr. Fitzroy. She is fit to go to the ends of the earth. You must take care of her and see that she keeps quiet at first, but by the time she's through the Bay she'll race you up the rigging and beat you."

"Youth will be served, Sir James," remarked Rodney. "Cyril's getting gray-haired."

"It's a repetition of the Jekyll and Hyde fiasco. The hair-dye which imparted that universally admired shade of light brown has at last run out and though I've ransacked London I



can't get the original order repeated. Hence my departure for India. I depend on you, Rodney, to advise me out in Calcutta what color of hair the world of fashion is adopting in London and I will assume it ten minutes before I descend the gangway at Tilbury." He looked at Rodney's thinning locks. "I fancy that a slight degree of baldness will be the mode."

The doctor laughed.

"I wish I could stay for the continuation of these feline amenities. I thought they were always confined to the other sex, but I see I was mistaken. Can anyone tell me where Lady Delaunay is?"

"She's lying down, Sir James," said Myra. "Do you want to see her?"

"If she's lying down I won't disturb her. I only wanted to say good-bye and congratulate her on the health-restoring properties of the air down here. Will you make her my apologies for running away like this, Miss Woodbridge? I have an appointment to keep before dinner to-night, and if anyone can tell me where my car has hidden itself, I will be getting under way."

Cyril got up and walked towards the house.

"I'll tell your man to come round, Sir James. Did you bring any coats or bags? No? Not even a stray skeleton?"

"Not even a stray skeleton, I am afraid. I'm much obliged to you. I'll wait here till it comes."

Cyril disappeared into the house and the doctor began the round of his adieux.



“Good-bye, Miss Woodbridge, I shall probably see you in town before long. Good-bye, Mr. Trelawney. Good-bye, Lady Violet. Don’t try to do too much at first, and send me a line from Suez to say how you are enjoying the heat and to tell me that you’re completely recovered. Keep an eye on your guardian—he wants a change as much as you do—and see that he doesn’t run any unnecessary risks.”

Myra laughed.

“You don’t know Cyril, Sir James, if you fancy him taking any risks—particularly when he’s in charge of his ward. He is caution personified.”

Sir James Farraday looked at her rather closely.

“One never knows, Miss Woodbridge. I think the advice in general is good.”

“Even though it doesn’t apply much in this particular instance?”

“Well, I think it is applicable to us all. And now once more, good-bye.”

“Good-bye, doctor, and thank you for all you’ve done for me.” Lady Violet stood in front of him holding both his hands in hers. “If it hadn’t been for you—I shouldn’t be here now.”

Sir James began to wear a puzzled expression and looked at the girl in front of him in the same way that he had looked at Myra a moment before.

“Has your guardian ever talked to you about your illness, Lady Violet?” She shook her head.

“You know he was in the house the whole time



you were ill? But nothing more?" He hesitated. "Well, I'm going to break the seal of my professional secrecy—because I don't propose to accept gratitude where it is not due."

It was the turn of the others to look surprised, and Myra asked what was meant.

Sir James still stood holding Violet's two hands and looking affectionately down at her.

"Do you know how bad you were, Lady Violet? Of course you wouldn't. But there was one night when I had to go into the library and tell your guardian that I could do no more and that the disease had got out of my control. You did not hear about that?"

Very pale in the face, Violet shook her head.

"That was the time when I noticed the change in his hair that Mr. Trelawney was joking him about. Well—he suggested putting a tube in your throat and sucking the stuff out. I told him I could not take the responsibility of recommending such a course—that anyone who took the risk must take it with his eyes open to the danger. He said he would go through with it." Sir James laughed. "He said it was part of a guardian's extensive and peculiar duties." He turned for a moment as his car swept round the corner of the house and drew up opposite where they were standing. "That's the reason why I told you to keep an eye on him, Lady Violet, and see that he doesn't run his head into danger."

With a parting wave of the hand he stepped into the car and drove away. A long silence



prevailed among the three, to be broken at last by Rodney remarking:

“I didn’t think he’d got it in him.”

“I was waiting for it to come out,” said Myra.

Lady Violet offered no contribution, but turned and walked slowly across the lawn to the house.



## CHAPTER XIX

### EVERARD FITZROY OF ALL PEOPLE PLAYING PROVIDENCE

“Inveni, germana, viam.”—VIRGIL.

**M**R. FITZROY, are you in the mood to give me some good advice?”

Everard Fitzroy was basking in the sun by the side of the stream which ran at the bottom of Lady Delaunay's lawn. He had selected the most capacious of the garden chairs, induced a boy to carry it down to the water's edge, and, after annexing *The Times* from the library and suitably providing himself with cigars, was preparing to spend the morning in contemplative repose.

“My dear lady, I spend most of my waking hours in the distribution of unsolicited advice, but only give it where I think it is needed. That is why I make so many enemies among my near relations. I cannot conceive that you can really need my advice; your life is too beautifully ordered to want a guiding hand on the reins, my hand least of all.”

“Thank you, Mr. Fitzroy. Did Cyril teach you to talk like that, or have you taught him? The words come from a common mint.”



"I must have sat at his feet, Miss Woodbridge. Nowadays we all have to learn wisdom from the mouths of babes and sucklings. That's what surprises me in your coming to seek my advice instead of going to the omniscient Cyril."

"Ah, but it's about Cyril that I want your advice." Myra sat down on the grass in front of him and clasped her hands over her knees. "If you've had any experience of domestic disturbances, Mr. Fitzroy, I want to reap the fruit of it. I come to you because Cyril always says you're the soundest person he knows to approach in times of trouble or difficulty." She smiled. "You see, you mustn't fall below the standard he's set up for you."

"But what is the nature of the disturbance?"

"There isn't one."

"But I don't understand. You said you wanted to reap the fruit of my experience in the matter of domestic disturbances."

"Yes, I want you to engineer a disturbance."

"But why? And who is to be involved?"

"I want a disturbance between Cyril and me."

"And the reason?"

"Because I want to clear his mind of a misapprehension. He thinks he is in love with me."

"And isn't he?"

"No." Myra laughed a little sadly. "I wish he were."

Everard's manner became unwontedly serious.

"And so do I, Miss Woodbridge. As we're speaking under the seal of the confessional, I will



tell you frankly that I hoped to find you two married when I came back from India. Or, if not married, at least on the road there."

"As we're under the seal of the confessional, Mr. Fitzroy, you have not been disappointed. It has fortunately not been made public, but Cyril and I are engaged to be married."

"But—good heavens, when did this take place?"

"Oh—a long time ago—at the time you sailed for India."

"Then why this secrecy, and above all, why this delay?"

"It was Cyril's wish and I must admit that he has been right and I have been wrong. I'd better tell you the whole story."

"Please do so, and above all make it clear why you want the domestic disturbance. I am entirely in the dark there."

"Excuse my asking, but have you ever discussed me with your sister-in-law?"

"With Evelyn? Yes, I have, from time to time. We disagreed on the subject—as she wanted you to marry Rodney Trelawney and I had other designs for you. Why do you ask?"

"Because it would help to clear things up if Evelyn had ever told you about what she regards as my preposterous views of marriage."

"They are new to me. We've only discussed marriage in the concrete."

"Well, Evelyn once held a brief for Rodney and tried to reason me into marrying him." She broke off and looked away at the reflection in



the water of the tree under which they were sitting. "Poor Rodney, I'm afraid I've treated him very badly and I'm going to be punished for it now. He offered me everything he had, and I said—not to him, of course, but to Evelyn—that I wanted a husband of my own choosing and that I should never be happy till I met a man who was quite indifferent to me and made him love me against his will. I suppose at twenty that did not seem so fantastic as it does now, Mr. Fitzroy. Anyway, I told Rodney that I could not do what he wanted."

"And then?"

"And then I got engaged to Cyril. Not all in a moment, but you had been talking to him before you went away and advising him to marry. I found him in—what is it called?—a septic condition. He thought he was in love with me and wasn't certain of himself. I found him preparing to go to South Africa to be out of temptation."

"And you persuaded him to stay and face the temptation?"

"Yes—that was my second big mistake. He admitted that he was attracted to me, but not strongly enough to stand the strain of my company for a lifetime. He didn't put it quite like that, but it was what he meant. He said he had never brought himself to think of anybody's interests but his own, and if he married me on the inspiration of a moment he could not answer for the durability of his affections."

"Well?"



"I told him to spend two years as a probationer, to find out his own feelings and see if he felt in a state of grace at the end of the time."

"What did he say to that?"

"Oh, he accepted the bargain." Myra smiled. "He said if I ever heard of him sacrificing himself for someone else, I should know the Ethiopian had changed his skin. Well, the two years are up now."

Everard Fitzroy allowed himself a few minutes to think over Myra's confession.

"There is still one point you have not cleared up, Miss Woodbridge. The two years are at an end and you want this engagement to come to an end too. Am I to take it that Cyril has not cleared himself in the ordeal?"

"No. I think he has come out of it with remarkable credit."

"Then why won't you let him have his reward?"

"I would if he would take it. Or rather, I wouldn't, because he might take it and spoil his whole life. He doesn't want the reward, if we are to give it that name."

"Oh, it's Cyril who wants to end the engagement?"

"Yes, only he doesn't know it. Mr. Fitzroy, this is the position. He and Violet are going out to India; it's quite possible if things are fairly quiet out there that she will stay with her father till the end of his term of office. In that case, back comes Cyril, the guardianship over, and we've got to make up our minds one way or the



other. If you can't suggest some means of breaking off the engagement, he will go through with it in the best of good faith—firmly believing that he is in love with me. Some day he'll find out that he isn't and then my troubles will begin."

"You keep saying he's not in love with you, but are you sure of it?"

"Mr. Fitzroy, there's only one person in the world he cares a snap of the fingers for."

"And who's that? Himself?"

"Oh, dear me, no. These are the days of his regeneration. I am thinking of Violet."

"But, my dear girl, she's a mere child."

"She's eighteen, Mr. Fitzroy."

"She's a child for all that. I remember before Darlington left England, he and Cyril were wrangling about her, because Cyril said she was being developed too quickly. He appears to be doing his best to keep her in pinafores and high-waisted frocks so as to make her dependent on his advice and assistance in everything. I do not think you need fear rivalry in that direction, Miss Woodbridge."

"I must disagree with you, Mr. Fitzroy. All men are secretly flattered when weak, helpless woman comes and asks their aid." She smiled up at him. "I expect you are just a little bit gratified at my coming and asking your advice this morning. Anyway, Cyril is no exception; the only thing which made him come out of himself was having Violet to look after, it is the old natural division of the sexes, man the food getter



and protector of the home, woman the house-keeper and mother of his children."

"I am still unconvinced, Miss Woodbridge."

"Then I will convince you." She told him the story that Sir James Farraday had related the day before, adding rather pathetically, "You see, the ordeal proved what I knew it would prove, but the case was decided against me."

Everard Fitzroy smoked on long and silently.

"I see the position, Miss Woodbridge," he said at last, "but I see further than you do, and you have given me a difficult problem to solve. Put it in simple language. Cyril is to be convinced that he is not really in love with you. How is that to be managed? By convincing him that he is in love with Lady Violet. How are we going to do that?" He ruminated in silence for fully five minutes while Myra sat quietly before him still clasping her hands over her knees and looking up at him. "We want a stalking-horse, Miss Woodbridge, and I don't know where we are going to find one."

"A stalking-horse?"

"Yes. We must find someone who is going to keep a face sufficiently straight not to arouse friend Cyril's suspicions, and then he is going to ask the guardian's permission to pay his addresses to the ward." Everard chuckled. "I fancy that will make them both come out of their shells. But it will want delicate handling."

"I don't know whom you will find to do it."

"Nor do I at present, but that's not my prin-



cipal difficulty. You're still the stumbling-block, Miss Woodbridge."

"I?"

"Yes, my dear lady. It's not enough to stir Cyril and Violet up in the most approved Drury Lane Autumn Melodramatic form to declare their undying love for each other. If I know anything of Cyril or any other man in his position, he will still be no nearer cutting the knot if it means—well, jilting a girl he's fond of—a girl he's been engaged to for a couple of years!" Myra made no answer. "Miss Woodbridge, the initiative must come from you. Before our great third act, in which the hero declares himself, we must have the satisfaction of knowing that he's leaving no broken hearts behind, that you are 'suitably provided for,' as the lists of bequests say in the newspapers."

Myra shook her head.

"It is impossible, Mr. Fitzroy. Even if it were, it would be bad tactics. It makes poor Violet look a little cheap if Cyril only goes to her when I've thrown him over. You must find some other way out."

"Well, we'll make his declaration and yours simultaneous." Everard got up from the chair and stretched himself. "Miss Woodbridge, that is my scheme, and I propose to go through with it whether you approve or no. I am now going up to the house to gather allies. It seems to me that this is the moment of all moments for John Stanford to add a new experience to his life."



His voice softened for a moment as he turned to go. "Miss Woodbridge, it's not every girl who would have the courage to do what you've done this morning. If I were twenty years younger I would—well—I would ask you to give me the same 'Two Years' Probation that Cyril had."



## CHAPTER XX

### DUPLICITY OF EVERARD FITZROY

*"Martiis cælebs quid agam Calendis?—HORACE.*

THE peace of a summer afternoon at De-launay Towers was usually unbroken between luncheon and tea, but the afternoon following on Myra Woodbridge's conversation with Everard Fitzroy was disturbed from an unaccustomed and unexpected quarter. Everard had begun to play Providence. Regardless of the detriment to his digestion which always resulted from after-luncheon insomnia, and unse-duced by the example of Myra and Cyril, who had subsided into two chairs under distant elm-trees on the lawn, he was observed pacing up and down the long terrace, lost in thought. Myra watched him, wondering how he proposed to solve the problem she had put to him that morning, wondering too whether, in consideration of the whole-hearted remedies he proposed applying, she would not have been wiser to keep her own counsel. Cyril was absorbed in a book and declined to take notice of the history which was even at that moment being made at his expense.

At the end of half an hour Everard disappeared into the smoking-room to emerge a moment later



with John Stanford at his side. Then the pacing was resumed and from time to time they left the terrace and wandered on the lawn. The conversation was carried on in an undertone, but an occasional word or laugh reached Myra's ears, and once as they passed her chair she heard Everard remark, "Of course if she takes you seriously there'll be the devil to pay, but it's a risk we must take," and Johnny answered, "Oh, I shouldn't be so badly off, anyway." Then their voices became inaudible.

Three-quarters of an hour appeared to be necessary for John Stanford's schooling; then he returned to the house through the smoking-room window and Everard went in by the side-door. Five minutes later Myra caught sight of Everard's face at an upper window; it was Rodney's window, for Rodney found it necessary to fortify his nervous system by retiring to bed for a couple of hours every afternoon. Myra did not choose to speculate on what orders Everard was issuing in that chamber of sleep and buried herself in her book till tea-time. Then from their various hiding-places conspirators and victims emerged and rubbed shoulders round the tea-table—Everard, Rodney, and John Stanford, all with expressions of exaggerated innocence; Violet and Cyril in happy ignorance of their fate. She was uncertain in which category to place herself.

It was Everard's intention that his little drama should be played between tea and dinner; accordingly he waited till the party had dispersed, gave



a few final instructions to John Stanford, and then disappeared from view. Myra was oppressed with a feeling of anxious uncertainty and lost little time in secluding herself in a remote quarter of the garden, and as Violet still spent many hours of the day lying down and resting, Cyril found himself deserted and took refuge in the smoking-room.

He had been established with an armchair, a pipe, and the current number of *Punch* for about fifteen minutes when John Stanford sauntered in.

"Hallo, Cyril, you're the very man I've been looking for. Put down *Punch* and give me your attention. I want to talk to you on a serious matter."

"So many people clamor for my company, Johnny, that I have practically no time to myself for the improvement of my mind. Consequently I shall not put down *Punch* till you have proved that your serious conversation offers a rival attraction. To be candid, you look rather uninteresting to-day: it is the absence of the flute. When you are seen carrying a flute in a shiny leather case you become an object of absorbing interest and people at once begin speculating whether you do it for fun or a bet, or whether you really hold a subordinate post in the orchestra of a minor West-End eating-house."

"Never mind the flute, Cyril, and try to be serious for once. I want your advice."

"What have you been doing?"

"Nothing; it's what I propose doing. I am thinking of getting married."



"Cold-blooded braggart! I am not going to save you; and as I don't propose to marry you myself, how does my assistance come in?"

"I want your advice and approval in respect of my choice."

"Does she know it yet? Or are you hanging yourself in a menacing attitude over the entire unmarried section of British female society?"

"She does not know it yet."

"Then it is your duty to tell her. At the cost of a little temporary pain to her, you must secure the peace of mind of the rest."

"That is what I propose to do. Now, I want your advice and approval—advice as to whether you think I have any reasonable prospects of success, and approval of my making the attempt."

"Well, first tell me the fortunate girl's name."

"Your ward—Lady Violet."

Cyril looked at him seriously for a moment and then burst out laughing.

"Don't try to pull my leg, Johnny, but leave me in peace with *Punch*." He went back to his paper still chuckling and quite regardless of the look of irritation on his friend's face. John Stanford's foot tapped the floor for a moment and when he spoke it was with an air of dangerous calmness.

"Look here, Cyril. I think you'll admit I'm entitled to decent treatment in this matter. I have done the straight thing by you and I think you should return the compliment."

"What do you mean?"



"Well. I paid you the compliment of approaching you first and asking if you had any objection, instead of going direct to Violet and ignoring your position as guardian."

"Well?"

"Well. I put it to you. Have you any objection to my approaching Violet on the subject? If you have—any valid objection, I mean—tell me at once and I will say no more. If you have not, I ask for your permission to go on and try my luck. Nothing definite will be arranged till her father has been consulted. What is it to be?"

"Are you in earnest, Johnny?"

"Never more so."

"Well, then, I think you're riding for a fall. I don't know, of course, but I've never seen the slightest indication that she regards you otherwise than as a friend."

"That's not my real point. If I take a toss that's my lookout. The question is: have you any objection on the score of age, means, character, suitability, and so forth—to my having a try?"

"On the score of suitability—I have the strongest objection."

"Possibly; but can you mention anyone you *would* regard as suitable for Violet?"

Cyril laughed.

"No—I don't think I can. As regards age—you're what? Twenty-four?"

"Twenty-four and she's eighteen."

"Character? There was that girl at Assisi three years ago . . ."



"That was a libel expressly invented by Stuart Phillips for your benefit. You can let that pass."

Cyril looked his friend up and down for a few minutes in silence. When he saw that Johnny was obviously sincere he had ceased to be amused and had grown anxious. After all, was it so certain that Violet would reject him? When he spoke it was in a very quiet and sober tone.

"On reflection, Johnny, I don't think I have any objection to offer. As I said before, I don't think she'll have you, but I can promise you that anything I can say in your favor——"

He broke off as the door opened and Violet entered the room.

"Your uncle told me I should find you in here, Cyril. I think it will be good for you to take me on the river for half an hour before dinner. Hallo, Johnny, I didn't see you. You're both looking preternaturally solemn. What is exercising your great brains?"

"We've been talking about you chiefly, Vi, and that always makes me look careworn. Is there any reason why we shouldn't pursue the conversation, Johnny?"

John Stanford affected to think for a moment and then replied in a hesitating voice:

"No, no; none that I know of."

Violet looked round for a suitable chair, and not finding one to her liking, walked behind Cyril and leaned on the back of his. Her arms hung down and her hands were clasped over his chest. Cyril caught them in his own and began to speak, finding some difficulty in the selection of words.



"Well, Vi dear, as I said—we've been talking about you. Johnny has made a most extraordinary request; at least, when I say extraordinary I suppose I ought to have been prepared for it, but it came as rather a surprise. Vi, Johnny has asked my permission to, well—to pay his addresses to you." He paused, but as neither made any sound he felt constrained to go on. "Of course, Johnny very properly realizes that I have no voice in the matter beyond a formal expression of approval or the other thing. That is a matter for you and I hope you will give no definite promise without consulting your father." Another pause and still no sound. "Well, Johnny asks me if I know any valid objection to his offering himself, and for your benefit and his I can conscientiously say I don't. He is one of my oldest friends and one of the best fellows God ever put into the world. If you marry him, I give you my blessing for what it's worth, and if someone else marries him, she will have my congratulations." He unclasped her hands and stood up facing her. "Don't decide in a hurry, Vi, and don't be influenced by anyone's feelings but your own. Now I'll leave you."

He stumbled towards the window, but was recalled before he could get out on to the terrace. Violet was standing behind his chair, very pale and with eyes brightly shining. She pointed to the seat he had left, and after a moment's hesitation he dropped into it. She kept silence for a short time as she tried to find words for what



she wished to say, and Cyril was conscious of her right hand seeking the support of his. Then she spoke, slowly and with a tremor in her voice.

"Johnny dear, this is as much of a surprise to me as to Cyril. I never imagined you—you looked at me in that light, and I feel very much honored that you should make this—suggestion. But I'm afraid it's no use." She smiled wistfully at him. "It wouldn't be fair to you to pretend it was, and I am afraid I must give you my answer now." She paused, and the silence was broken by Johnny asking, in a mechanical tone:

"I suppose I am to take it that means 'No'?"

She nodded without answering, and Cyril could feel her hand trembling in his.

"I am very sorry, Johnny, that I can't say the other thing, but you never entered into my scheme of life in that character and I may as well tell you so at once."

Johnny Stanford got up from his chair with a set face and tightly closed lips.

"Then I suppose I must take that as your last word on the subject. May I ask one other thing? Am I rejected on my own demerits or in favor of someone else?"

"That is a question you have no right to ask, Johnny," said Cyril sharply.

"Every man whose hand is refused as mine has been has a right to know if it is by reason of some intrinsic defect in his character."

"I don't agree."

"It is a question for Violet to decide," said



Johnny coldly. "I put the question to her again. Is there anyone with a higher claim on your affections?"

Violet strangled a sob and tried unsuccessfully to answer. Then another sob and she managed to get out the word "Yes."

"Then I will say good-bye." Johnny bowed with dignity and walked out of the room. Violet walked unsteadily to his chair and sank into it, the whole of her slight body shaking with sobs which she could barely suppress. Cyril crossed over and dropped on one knee by her side, holding her hand and not speaking till she should be recovered from the shock of surprise which the last few minutes had caused her. Gradually he felt her hand ceasing to tremble and a moment later she looked down on him with a smile.

"I'm all right now, Cyril. What are you looking at me like that for?"

"Like what?"

"As if you'd just had the biggest surprise of your life. It's different for me."

"I can't think of anything that surprised me more."

"Than what? My refusing Johnny?"

"No; what you just told him, about refusing him in favor of someone else."

By way of reply she stroked his hair with her disengaged hand.

"You never suspected that, Cyril?"

"I did not. I told Johnny he was riding for a fall, but I never suspected the other thing."



"And you don't like my keeping it a secret from you, dear, and you are too proud to ask me to tell you his name?"

Cyril shrugged his shoulders.

"I think we've got enough confidence in each other, darling, for me to know that you will take no irrevocable step without consulting your father. If you have consulted him, well and good; if you have not, you doubtless will. In anything that may happen short of an irrevocable step I feel it would be impertinent for me to interfere."

"The subject has no interest for you?"

"The subject carries with it no right of interference."

"I see. Poor Cyril, I believe you were as much surprised and upset as I was, though you didn't show it."

"It did come as a surprise, certainly, though I ought to have been prepared for it."

"Had Johnny thrown out any hints before?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of Johnny. I was thinking that my guardianship can't go on forever, however much I might wish it to, but I never really realized it till to-day. Fitzgerald uses rather a good expression in one of his letters—'before I knew I was to die.' Most of us spend a good many years of our lives without thinking of death as having any reference to ourselves. We imagine a special dispensation of Providence in our favor, till the dreadful morning when we wake up like old Edward Fitzgerald and find we're just as mortal as our neighbors.



I suppose that was my frame of mind about the 'Anstruther Trust' till Johnny came as a reminder."

Violet looked at him critically, with her head on one side.

"You've made a very tolerable guardian, Cyril, I am in no hurry to give up being your ward."

A very gentle sigh escaped him.

"It's got to come, though, Vi darling, when your father comes back to England, if not sooner. He may want to keep you when we get you out to India. Besides, in three years' time you'll be of age and free to control your own property and go your own sweet way in the world without having me to bother you."

"And what will you do then?"

"I really don't know."

"Get a new ward?"

"Never!"

"How funny! I should have thought you would have been lonely without one. I should miss my guardian far too much, so when I come of age my first responsible action will be to place myself and my chattels in trust again with you to look after me."

"I'm afraid it won't do, Vi dear."

"Why not?" She got up and moved towards the door.

"What a question! after you've just told me that Johnny has been rejected in favor of someone else. I fancy the Some One Else will have something to say to your trustee-guardian."



"I can assure you that the Some One Else will never stand in the way of the Guardian, and the Guardian will never stand in the way of the Some One Else."

"I don't follow you."

"No, because you were too proud to ask the Some One Else's name."

She kissed the tips of her fingers to him with a laugh as she slipped through the doorway. Cyril had suffered too many surprises that afternoon to think very quickly or clearly. When he fancied that he had caught her meaning, his feelings were equally compounded of joy and dismay, to which was added an element of embarrassment as he stepped out on to the terrace and nearly fell over the form of his uncle, who was dozing in an armchair with a newspaper on his knees. But the embarrassment lasted only a moment. Everard was a very sound sleeper and could not possibly have heard what took place in the adjoining room.



## CHAPTER XXI

"Men marry because they are tired, women because they are curious. Both are disappointed."—OSCAR WILDE.

### A GLIMMERING OF DAYLIGHT

DINNER that night proved less of an ordeal than Cyril's disordered imagination had foretold. His ward was still considered too much of an invalid to take anything but a light meal in her room. John Stanford sat at the far end of the table from him and seemed far less dejected than he had anticipated; indeed, Everard felt constrained to remind him privately in the drawing-room that he was a rejected suitor and proportionately heartbroken, hinting the advisability of an early withdrawal from Delaunay Towers next morning. Cyril was not called upon to make any serious contribution to the general conversation, and sat in silence, brooding over the events of the afternoon, while the conversational ball was left in his uncle's capable hands. Myra also was silent, nerving herself for an interview with Cyril later on in the evening.

The meal passed without incident and Everard's flow of anecdotes and badinage continued long after the ladies had left the room. He was pleased with his successful appearance in the



rôle of Providence and spared no effort to maintain the success unabated until the fall of the last curtain, and for this purpose it was necessary to leave Cyril to deal undisturbed with the conflicting thoughts which surged through his brain. His own duel with Myra had ended before dinner and had ended in her complete discomfiture. She was now writing a long letter to Evelyn Fitzroy and had just sealed and stamped it when the men entered the drawing-room and Cyril suggested a stroll in the cooler air of the garden.

They walked in silence for the length of the terrace, and it appeared to her that the task of opening the conversation lay on her shoulders.

"Do you know yet how long you and Violet are going to be away, Cyril?" she asked.

"I don't, Myra. It rather depends on her father and on Enid. If he wants to keep her with him I shall probably come straight home; if not, we may wander eastward and come back via Japan and the States."

"And then?"

"And then I shall come and see what's happened to you, Myra dear, in my absence."

Myra hesitated and then said very gently:

"I was thinking, Cyril, that if you are away for more than about six months, you will probably come home to find me married."

"Then I shall get off at Marseilles and be back within a month of leaving England." He spoke lightly but without carrying conviction in his tone.



"I am afraid that won't make much difference, Cyril, except that you may be in time to see me married."

"I thought perhaps I might be in time to marry you myself. You will remember we discussed the matter in that spirit a couple of years ago."

"Yes, but with me it has not yet come to the point of getting married at all costs, regardless of the instrument of fate. I am not in such a hurry to get married that I couldn't wait for your return if I wanted to."

"No, but it means that my presence at the ceremony is no longer indispensable."

"Yes, Cyril. You must feel that yourself."

"The 'Cleansing Fire' has not been sufficiently efficacious? I was afraid that two years would find a good many spots still lingering about the leopard's skin."

"No, I have no fault to find with the two years' probation."

"Then, Myra, why in the name of all that's wonderful do you come and tell me that the probation is thrown away and the prize you offered two years ago is withdrawn from competition?"

"I never said that the probation was thrown away. It has proved one thing that I expected and another that was quite unexpected."

"You must speak in language suited to a tired brain, Myra."

"Well, it proved that you could sacrifice yourself, which I expected; and it proved that the



sacrifice was not made for me. I had a talk with Sir James Farraday yesterday," she added with apparent irrelevance; "Violet must have been a lot worse than any of us imagined."

"And in consequence of this —?"

"In consequence of this, oh, Cyril dear, do try and understand me. It's been getting clearer and clearer every day for the last two years, and that was the final test. I've been writing to your aunt to-night, telling her she was right and I was wrong. Right from the first she told me that I ought to marry Rodney because he really loved me, and you never did, Cyril dear, however much you may think it. And I wanted to make you love me, and I tried very hard, and one day I thought I was beginning to succeed. But then Violet came, and you had her to look after and I began to understand you. I'm too independent, Cyril, for you; you want somebody who will look up to you and depend on you and need your help and support. That's why you and Violet are going to be very well suited and very happy together. But I shouldn't do for you and you wouldn't do for me, and it's no use pretending for the sake of a promise two years old that we should." She stopped with a catch in her voice.

"And you're going to marry Rodney?"

"I think so, when I've had a little more time to think about it. And you are going to marry Violet."

"I shall want a great deal of time to think about



it. Johnny Stanford asked me to-day if I knew of anyone suitable for her, meaning 'good enough,' I said 'no,' and I still think so."

"But you've got to get used to the idea."

"I'm getting too old, Myra, for these quick-changes."

"Well, it wasn't a quick-change with me. It took nearly two years to convince me. It's different for you; you barely had two hours to think about it."

"And I shall want a great many more."

"Which you will get, the whole way from London to Calcutta, and when you meet Lord Darlington, you must have forgotten me and the Temple and the probation and everything."

He turned to her without answering and stood watching the moonlight shining on her soft dark eyes and glorious hair. The same thought was in both their minds: it was the last time they would ever meet like this. Then he caught her two hands and lifted them reverently to his lips, and as he bent over them she leaned forward and kissed him gently on the forehead.

"Not forgotten, Myra. Whatever the ending, oh Myra, these two years were worth it!"

THE END



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